The Mist on the Moors

BY

JOSEPH HOCKING

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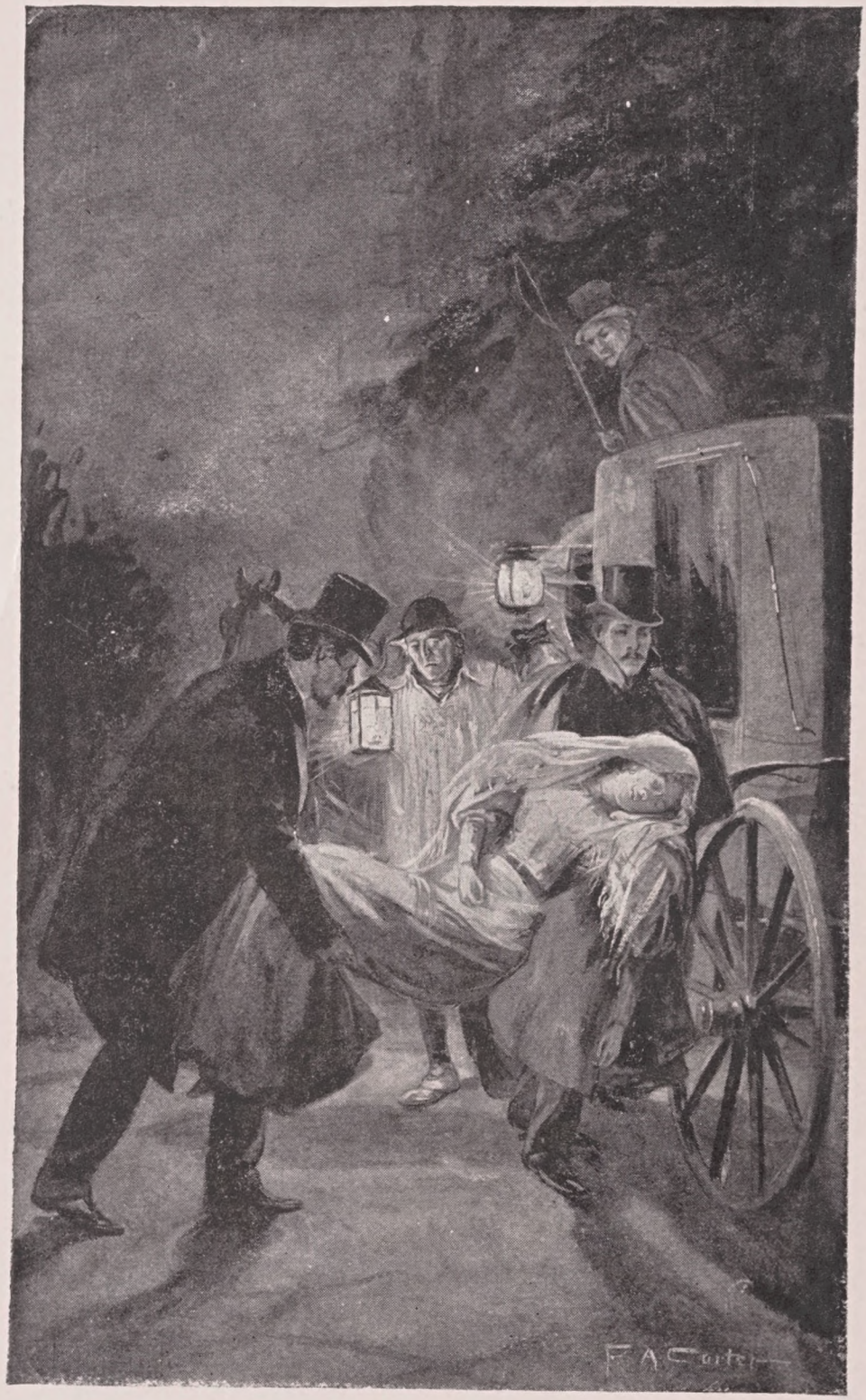

"The flash of light which rested on her was only momentary, but I saw the features of a young girl."—Page 26.

THE MIST ON THE MOORS

A Romance of North Cornwall

BY

JOSEPH HOCKING

AUTHOR OF "THE STORY OF ANDREW FAIRFAX"
"ALL MEN ARE LIARS" ETC.

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THE MIST ON THE MOORS.

CHAPTER I.

How the Mist Gathered.

There are those who say that the life lived on Altarnun Moors is very gloomy and monotonous. This, of course, is true when one considers the goings on in places like Bodmin and Liskeard, to say nothing of Plymouth and Exeter. At the same time, I am inclined to think that people living in these great towns set too high a value on their kind of life, and forget that the country places are centres of attraction, of excitement and romance. Anyhow, I claim that Altarnun Moors, and all that region around Router and Brown Willy, dreary and desolate as it may be, have had interests as exciting, ay, and as tragic, as those found in great centres of population. Not that I am much acquainted with the great towns. I have

been to Plymouth and Exeter several times, and on one occasion I went to London. I do not want to go there again, however. There was too much noise and hurry for me. I never had a chance of resting, and even when I was tired and wanted a little peace, there was always something to make me keep on rushing about like the rest of the people. However, that is not what I wanted to write about. I claimed just now that Altarnun Moors and all the vast tracts of land round about are just as interesting as places like Liskeard or Bodmin, and that things have happened there as exciting as anyone need wish for. I know that in these days story-books are written by clever men who invent all sorts of exciting incidents in order to amuse people. But I, who tell this story, have no need to invent anything; and although I do not pretend to write like people who do but little else, and who, as a consequence, are practised hands, I have the advantage of them, for what I am going to relate actually took place. Perhaps you who read this may not regard it as remarkable, but the facts I have to tell caused no little stir in the parish in which I was born.

As I have something to do with this story, perhaps I had better tell who I am, and

how my path crossed that of people who are far more interesting than I can claim to be.

My name is Robert Tremain. Tremain is an old Cornish name, and although there are branches of the family wealthier and better known than mine, I must confess to a certain amount of pride because of my ancestry. Rosecarrol House and farm have belonged to our family for generations, and while we never claimed to rank with the landed gentry of the county we held our heads as high as those who did. Indeed, my father, just after I was born, determined that I should not be a whit behind the Magors, the Hansons, and the rest of them, and so, in order to add farm to farm, he speculated with his ready-money on some clay works and mines which lay in the neighbourhood of St. Austell. He also, as soon as I was old enough, sent me to Probus Grammar School, where I was supposed not only to obtain an education befitting a gentleman, but to acquire the manners of one.

What the results of my being a pupil at Probus School were, I will not say, but my father's speculations in clay works and mines were anything but successful. Indeed, such failures were they, that on my twenty-first

birthday my father asked me to consider the condition of affairs.

"Robert," he said, after drinking a good part of a bottle of wine, "I intended making you a rich man, and I have made you a poor one."

I was not altogether prepared for this, for while I knew that the clay works and mines had been a failure, I still depended on Rosecarrol, which meant a thousand acres of land, five hundred of which were arable. I knew, too, that there were several hundred pounds' worth of cattle on the land, for while the farm was not stocked as heavily as it ought to be, it by no means spelt failure.

So I said, "What do you mean by making me a poor man, father?"

"Just exactly what I said, my lad," said my father, finishing the first bottle of wine, and opening another as if trying to keep his spirits up.

"I know your speculations have failed, father," I said, "but we've still got Rosecarrol."

"No, we haven't," he said.

"What!"

"No, we haven't," he repeated.

"How is that?"

"It's mortgaged—for every penny it is worth."

I knew now what my father's behaviour during the last few months meant. For, ordinarily an abstemious man, he had taken to drinking heavily, and while on some days he seemed in high spirits, laughing and shouting hilariously, at others he was gloomy and depressed.

I did not speak for perhaps a minute; then I said, angrily, "I suppose I'm a beggar, then?"

He nodded his head, and was silent for a time; then he said, "Unless——," and hesitated again.

"Unless what?" I demanded.

"You marry money."

I had not thought of marriage at all—at least seriously, and somehow my father's words hurt me. Like all other lads, I had dreamed of the girl I was to love, and, when the proper time came, to marry, but to hear my father speak in this way seemed to wound what finer feelings I possessed.

"Marry—money," I repeated, slowly.

"Yes," said my father, starting up, "that's the only thing that can save us, Bob. Rosecarrol is mortgaged for all it's worth; I am in debt for all the stock would bring. Sell

me up to-morrow, and I am not worth sixpence; and soon, very soon, my credit will be gone."

"Do you mean to say that people know that—that you aren't worth sixpence?"

"Many have doubts about it, and it might become known any day."

"Then—then——"

"You are a young fellow, good-looking, and all that. You—you—but there——," and my father sat by the table and covered his face with his hands.

My father's sorrow drove away a good deal of my anger, for I was angry. To think that Rosecarrol did not belong to me, and that all the stock was practically the property of other people, after all my plans and hopes concerning it, made me feel that my father had acted badly towards me. And yet, as I saw him in his suffering and sorrow, the bitter feeling began to leave my heart. After all, he had ventured his all for me, and had he been successful I should have praised instead of blamed him. Still it was with difficulty that I refrained from uttering angry words, for I was a proud fellow, and hated the thought of being poor. Moreover, the suddenness of the blow made it harder to bear.

"When will—will matters come to a—a crisis?" I asked, presently.

"The fellow who has advanced the money on Rosecarrol may want to call it in any day," he replied.

"Who is he?"

"Hezekiah Tamblin."

"What, the fellow who went to California, and made money in the gold diggings, and who regards it as the height of his ambition to keep a public-house?"

"That is the man; he says he keeps the public-house because he likes company, and because the farmers stop with him on their way to market. He farms a good piece of land, too; all Tredudle belongs to him."

"But why did you go to him for money?"

"Because he had it, and because he seemed anxious to lend it to me. You see, the fellow wants to get a position among the good families for whom he worked fifteen years ago as a servant."

"And what danger is there of his wanting to call in his money?"

"He is hoping some young gentleman farmer will marry his daughter, and he has promised £3,000 as her marriage dowry. When her marriage takes place you and I are ruined—unless——"

"Unless what?"

"You marry money."

Hezekiah Tamblin had not long been in our neighbourhood, and, although I had seen him several times, I had never spoken either to him or his daughter. For one reason, I had not been in the habit of going to Bodmin market, and so never had occasion to call at "The Queen's Head" on my way; and another was, that I considered it rather beneath me to frequent wayside public-houses. I had frequently gone to Launceston on horseback, and had met most of the principal men of our parish there, but did not remember having spoken to Hezekiah Tamblin.

My father's revelation, however, had made me interested in him; I wanted to meet the man in whose power we were. I wanted to talk with the girl whose marriage meant ruin to my father and myself.

I went to the window and looked out. It was a grey October day. Near the house were well-cultivated, loamy meadows, but beyond were the wild, dreary moors so common in the North of Cornwall. Both meadows and moors I had regarded as mine, but now I remembered with pain that they were the property of a coarse fellow who had gone to California as a farm-servant, and

who had by some means made money. Fifteen or twenty years ago he had doubtless come to my father for favours; now he was my father's master, ay, and my master, too. The grey autumn day was fast drawing to a close; in an hour or so more it would be dark. Although I did not feel cold, a shiver passed over me; I felt lonely, desolate.

"Father," I said, "does mother know anything about this?"

"Not a word."

I gave a sigh of relief. Perhaps—perhaps the pain of knowing might be kept from her. For my mother was an invalid, and had been for many years. When I was five years old my mother had nearly died in giving birth to my little sister, who lived only a few hours; and although the doctors said they saw no reason why her health should not return to her, she was confined to her room year after year. She was very gentle and very loving to me, and dearly did I love her. For that reason I did all in my power to keep her from trouble and pain, especially as the slightest worry caused her to be prostrate for days. Perhaps my mother loved me more than sons are usually loved; chiefly, I expect, because I was her

only living child, and because I spent as much time as I could with her.

"She has not the slightest idea that anything is wrong?" I asked, anxiously, after hesitating a few seconds.

"Not the slightest. I believe it would kill her if she knew of it," and my father went to a cupboard and took out a bottle of brandy, from which he poured a quantity into a tumbler, and drank it at a gulp.

"It would kill her if she knew you were drinking so much," I said, sternly.

"I can't help it," he replied. "It keeps up my spirits, it makes me forget. But for this I should have told her before now."

"But for that, I don't believe you would have thrown away your money," I said.

"Do what you can, Bob," said my father. "Believe me, I am sorry for you; but do what you can, if—if only for mother's sake."

"What can I do?" I asked, angrily.

"You are a good-looking, well-educated fellow, Bob," he cried; "marry an heiress, Bob; marry an heiress, become a squire!"

I saw that the brandy was getting into his head, and the thought of it made me still more angry. I dared not stay in the room with him for fear I should forget what

was due to him, so I put on my hat and went out among the fields.

I had not been out more than a few minutes before a cloud of mist swept over from the moors, while away in the distance I heard a low moaning sound, which told of a coming storm.

I tried to understand what it all meant: Rosecarrol the property of another, while debt swallowed up the value of all the farm stock. I went into the stables, and saw my own horse—the best horse for miles around—and I remembered that he might be sold any day. But more than all I thought of mother—homeless, penniless! I knew how she loved the old home. She had brought a good deal of money to father when they were married—indeed, virtually, Rosecarrol belonged as much to her as to him, and to think of the effect that the news of my father's position must have upon her maddened me.

Then my father's words rang in my ears: "Marry money, marry money." It seemed a base thing to do; and yet, as I remembered mother, I was prepared to do it—if I could.

A hundred plans passed through my mind, but none seemed feasible. Presently, how-

ever, I started for a walk across the moors. "I'll see the man who may ruin us any day," I said. "I'll see the woman whose marriage means making mother homeless."

An hour later, the lights of "The Queen's Head" appeared to me as I trudged over the prickly heather.

CHAPTER II.

A Strange Visit to Altarnun Moors.

When I arrived at "The Queen's Head" the kitchen was fairly full, but there was only one customer in the parlour. On Saturday evenings, I was given to understand, this bar parlour was generally full of that portion of the community who could afford to pay for spirits instead of beer or cider, but on the present occasion only one person was present. This was young Tom Nicolls, of Trewint. He was a decent fellow, and did fairly well with his farm, although some said he had hard work to live, on account of not being able to stock his land properly. Trewint was not a rich estate, but it would pay for farming, only report said that, although Tom's father left him the estate, he left him nothing to work it with. Of course, the place was nothing to Rosecarrol, neither did the Nicolls family pretend to stand as high as mine.

But Tom was not the only person in the

room. Behind the counter sat a young woman, perhaps twenty four or five years of age. She was a well-grown, buxom girl, with fair, fresh skin, and far from bad-looking. Indeed, I thought as I entered the room that in the whole of the district there was not one to compare with her. She smiled on me very pleasantly as I entered, which caused dimples to come in her cheeks, and made her face very pleasant.

"What can I serve you with, Mr. Robert?" she said, after I had shaken hands with Tom Nicolls.

For a second I hesitated; then I said, hastily, "Is—that is, can you tell me where Mr. Tamblin is?"

"He will not be home for hours yet," she said. "He has gone to Bodmin, and will not laive there until eight o'clock. Is there anything I can tell him?"

"Oh, never mind," I said. "I'll stay a few minutes, anyhow, and I can easily call again."

"I'm sure father'll be very plaised to see 'ee Mr. Tremain," she said, graciously.

And so we got to talking, and I was not long in discovering that she would rather talk with me than with Tom Nicolls, in spite of the fact that Tom tried to make himself

very agreeable. Every time I spoke to her she blushed, which, I thought, made her face prettier than ever, while I couldn't help feeling rather pleased that she evidently preferred me to Tom. And yet I was sure that Tom was in love with her. It was true her father had been a labourer, but he had made money, and her dowry, or, as the Cornish folks called it, "her fortin," was just what Tom needed to stock Trewint Farm properly, while Kezia Tamblin was a young woman who, apparently, would grace any farmhouse in England.

I could not help feeling, however, that there was something in her appearance I did not quite like. Her eyes seemed full of fun, and yet there was a look in them which suggested cunning. She was fairly tall and finely formed, but somehow her beauty appealed rather to my lower than to my higher nature. There was a taint of coarseness in her conversation, too. Not so much in her Cornish dialect, I did not mind that, but in the thoughts to which she gave expression. But then her occupation was not of the highest nature, and it might be that the constant hearing of rough jokes from farmers and their labourers might have dulled her finer nature.

All this I felt rather than thought, and yet I was fascinated. The fair, fresh face and the full, red lips charmed me. Besides, she was older than I, and I think that young fellows of one-and-twenty are often drawn to women four or five years older than themselves. In later years it is different.

I stayed talking for two hours, and still her father did not appear. I was not troubled about this—nay, rather, I was glad, for his absence gave me an excuse for staying on. No other customers came to the parlour, and presently Tom, evidently much against his will, left us alone.

"Is Mr. Tom Nicolls your sweetheart?" I said to her, when he had gone.

"He would like to be," she said, with a meaning smile.

"That's nothing strange," I replied. "For that matter, I should think lots of fellows around here would like to be."

She looked at me curiously, and then, some one calling her from the kitchen, left me alone. Somehow the fact of my poverty was less galling to me now. If Kezia Tamblin was the real owner of Rosecarrol, I did not so much mind, for I felt sure I should be able to retain my rights there by asking her to marry me. This, I know, may appear

vain, but I regarded her evident liking for me as an indication of that fact. Still, the thought was not pleasant to me at first. She was different from the wife which, as a boy, I had dreamed about; but I loved Rosecarrol, and my father's words still rang painfully in my ears.

When I left "The Queen's Head" I was under promise to visit it again soon, and for the first half-mile of my journey I pondered gravely over the question, as to whether I should not strike out boldly and ask her to be my sweetheart, with the understanding that a marriage should take place as soon as was mutually convenient. Unlike most youths of my age, I weighed the *pros* and *cons* very carefully, but you must remember that the news which my father told me had seemed to add years to my life, and left me with the feeling that in the future I must act for myself. Besides, I remembered mother, and I could not bear the idea of her being turned away from the home she loved.

It was a dark, misty night, but I knew the road well, and I had gone about one-third of my journey home when I heard the sound of carriage wheels.

"I wonder who's out with a carriage

here?" I asked myself, when I heard a stifled scream.

I turned towards the conveyance, and, in spite of the mist, saw that it was not an ordinary farmer's trap, but a close carriage. Knowing the manners of the whole countryside as I did, I was sure that it came from no place nearer than Bodmin, Liskeard, or Launceston,—unless, indeed, it was the property of some of the landed gentry. For be it understood, these were the towns nearest my home, and no railway was to be found within a dozen miles of Rosecarrol.

"Anything the matter?" I asked.

"What's that?" I heard a man's voice say, roughly.

"I asked if anything were the matter."

"Matter enough—we've lost our way."

"I know the countryside well," I replied. "I shall be pleased to give you any information in my power."

There was, however, no reply to my offer, and, on coming closer to the carriage, I saw two men enveloped in long coats, and, as far as I could judge, were conversing earnestly in low tones.

"Look here, my good fellow," said one of the men presently, "I want to know——"

He did not finish the sentence, however,

for he was disturbed by a second cry from the carriage, a cry which was immediately stifled.

"No more of that," shouted the man who had spoken to me, "there must be no noise."

"Anybody ill?" I said; "the nearest public-house is 'The Queen's Head.'"

"We don't want any public-house, my man, and there's nobody in the carriage that you need to trouble about."

The man spoke roughly, as though he were anxious to be rid of me, and yet he was evidently in a dilemma as to the course he ought to take.

I became interested. Such an incident was, to say the least of it, somewhat uncommon, and so I waited for further developments. The occupants of the carriage were now quite silent save that I thought I heard someone gasping as if in pain. Meanwhile, the two men whispered together again, while the driver sat still and dumb.

Unaccustomed as I was to the ways of certain phases of life, and reared in a part of the country where intrigues were few, I could not help being suspicious. The affair was evidently mysterious, and some of the persons concerned did not wish to be identified.

"Well, I'm zorry I caan't 'elp 'ee, gen'lmen," I said, relapsing into the Cornish vernacular, "for tes a wisht night to be out in when you doan't knaw the rooad."

"But you can help us," said the man. "Who are you?"

"I work 'pon the farm," I replied.

"And where have you come from now?"

"From 'The Queen's Head' down to Besuddle."

"And you know all the places around here?"

"Aw, iss, very well."

"Well, what are the places called?"

"Well, there's Altarnun, Tredaule, Trevague, Bolventor, Trewint, Bowithe——"

"Are these the names of farms?"

"Oa no, they be places weth several 'ouses in 'em."

"But what are the names of the farms around here?"

"Oa, there's Tolskiddy, Rosecarron, Besuddle, Trelyon, Dreardowns, and Bol——"

"Ah, which is the way to Drea—that is, to Trelyon?"

"Well, 'tes ruther a bad place to vind from 'ere, but ef you go down this laane for 'bout——"

Again I was interrupted by a noise from

within the carriage, a noise which, to me, sounded like the cry of someone in pain, then the window opened, and a woman's voice said, "Come, Mr. Edgar, quick."

Both men gave an oath, which was followed by a hurried conversation in a whisper between them; then one rushed to the carriage, while the other came to me.

The mist was so thick around us, and the night so dark, that I could by no means detect the man's features, but I saw that he was about the medium height, say five feet eight inches, or some five inches shorter than myself.

"This is a funny business," he said to me, confidentially; "we ought to have arrived at our destination before dark, but the roads from Bodmin are awfully bad, the carriage broke down, and we lost our way."

This statement aroused my suspicions more than ever. As a matter of fact, the road from Bodmin is a splendid one. It would be next to impossible for anybody to miss the way, while if they had come from Bodmin they must have passed before "The Queen's Head," in which case I was sure I should have heard them. However, I was wise enough to say nothing.

"Then," he went on, "we've got an old aunt of mine in the carriage who isn't

exactly right, and the doctor at Bodmin Asylum says that nothing will cure her but a regular change of air, so we are taking her on to Camelford."

"Oa, then you've got a ticklish job, I reckon," I said, with all the evident credulity of a farm-servant.

"Yes, we have, indeed. Which did you say was the way to Trelyon?"

I told him, just as an uneducated rustic might.

"And which to Bolventor?"

Without showing any surprise I told him, although it lay in the opposite direction.

Then he asked me about all the places in the neighbourhood, although I noticed that he took most interest in my description of the road to a farm called Dreardowns.

"I used to have a friend living in this neighbourhood," he said, "and I was going to stop at his house to-night, but the way is too hard to find."

"Yes," said the other, coming to us, "I have decided to drive on to Altarnun; there's a public-house there, and we must put up for the night. Here, my man, is a shilling for you, and you'd better get back to your home, or you'll get into trouble. Let me see, where did you say you lived?"

"I 'ave to git to Penliggle, sur," I replied, mentioning a little off farm which was a part of Rosecarrol Estate, and through which I had to pass in order to get home.

"Ah, well, I hope your master won't sack you for being out so late."

"I 'ope not, sur."

"Good night."

"Goo'night," I replied, gravely, and then stumbled up the lane which led to the moors. I did not go far, however. I determined, if possible, to see what the thing meant, and so, after waiting a few minutes, I got behind the hedge, and crept quietly back to them.

I saw that the men were lighting the carriage lamps, and making other preparations for the journey.

"I wish we'd asked old Sleeman to meet us," I heard one say, "we should have got rid of all this unpleasantness then."

"Still, I think we can find the road from that fellow's directions. Keep down this lane till we get to the moors, then follow the track across the moors till we come to a very big rock. Then take the left track down the hill till we get to a lane. Old Sleeman has got the right name for the place—it is a Dreardowns."

"I almost wish we had kept the fellow, so that he might have guided us there.

"That would not have done," was the reply; "these fellows are always fond of talking, and it would end in our affairs becoming known, and we don't want that, you know."

"Is she all right now?"

"Yes, she will be quiet until we get to Dreardowns, anyhow. Now we are ready to start."

"You think that fellow is beyond hearing?"

"Oh, yes, he'll be in bed by this time. He suspected nothing. All these fellows are more stupid than the cattle they drive. There, let us be off."

Slowly the carriage rumbled along the lane. In several places the road was very rough, and once they were in danger of upsetting the conveyance; but by-and-by they reached the open moor. I kept near, for I suspected foul play, and determined to know their destination, while a great desire came into my heart to find out who was in the carriage. The man had evidently tried to deceive me in relation to the other matters, and I had very little doubt but that the story of the crazy old aunt was also a fabrication.

Presently we drew near to Dreardowns farm buildings, and I judged by the flickering

lights that the party was expected. Dreardowns Farm was doubtless well named. The land comprising it had been reclaimed from the moors, and prior to the time of its cultivation was as dreary a place as could be found within sight of Router and Brown Willy. The house was built in a sheltered valley, which valley was so situated as to be completely hidden until you came close to it. It was an awesome, lonely spot, and was made, if possible, more eerie by the fir-trees, whose prickly foliage nearly hid the roomy house which the father of the present owner had built. I knew "old Sleeman" slightly, and remembered his voice as he said gruffly to the party, "You've come then!"

"Yes," was the reply; "is everything ready?"

"Everything."

"I suppose you can put us up for the night. I don't feel like crossing these vile moors again in the dark, but we must be away by dawn to-morrow."

"Iss, I spoase we c'n manage it. You'll want to taake 'er upstairs to wance, I reckon."

"That's it."

I stood near while the carriage door was

opened, being completely hidden by a tree behind which I stood. The mist had enabled me to gain this position without fear of detection.

The two men lifted a slight form from the carriage, while the farmer held a lantern. Perhaps Peter Sleeman was anxious to see the kind of inmate he was to have in his house, for he let the light shine upon her face. By so doing he dispelled whatever doubt I might have had about the occupant of the carriage being old. The flash of light which rested on her was only momentary, but I saw the features of a young girl. She was very pale, as pale as death, and in the flickering light of the candle looked ghastly. I was not sure, but I thought her chin was streaked with blood.

She lay perfectly motionless as the two men I had seen on the moors carried her into the house, and then I saw another woman, much older, follow them silently. I still waited, hidden behind the tree, and listened intently, but heard nothing distinctly. There was a confused hum of voices within, afterwards heavy footsteps on some bare wooden stairs, and then by the light from an upper window I saw they had taken their burden to one of the bedchambers. The

blind was drawn, however, so that I could see nothing that happened in the room.

A few seconds later, and I heard steps on the stairway again, followed by the sound of voices in the kitchen. "She'll be all right now," I heard Peter Sleeman say. "There's a good supper on the kitchen table, so you'd better git it while I go and 'elp the man to put up the hoss. I'll be back dreckly."

I still waited while the farmer assisted in foddering the horse, and while he, with the driver, pushed the carriage into the waggon-house; after this the two joined the others in the kitchen.

There was a good deal of talk on various matters, but I heard nothing concerning the young girl in whose fate I had become interested. My limbs were becoming cramped with remaining in one position so long, while the mist had wetted me to the skin. I was about to creep silently away when the kitchen door opened, and one of the men came to the door and looked out.

"It's as dark as dominion, Peter, and as lonely as death. You get no visitors here, I should think," I heard him say.

"Noan as you need bother about. We'm bettern a dozen mile from town or railway

station. Sometimes weeks pass and we doan't spaik to nobody but the people on the place."

"Everything is safe then?"

"Ef you've done your paart, it is."

"That's all right, then. Well, I'll lay down for an hour or two. We must be off before five."

"All right; I'll be up."

"Good night, then, Peter."

"Good night, sur."

A few minutes later all the lights were out save that in the room where I believed the young girl was. I waited a few minutes and watched, but I heard no sound. The light burnt steadily, but there was not even a shadow on the blind. No one seemed to move. If death reigned supreme the stillness could not have been more profound.

I crept away like one dazed. I could not understand that which I had seen and heard. The whole matter was shrouded in mystery. What was the meaning of those cries? Why was there struggling in the carriage? Who was the young girl who was carried into the lonely farmhouse like one dead? What had Peter Sleeman to do with it all?

I was young, and my nature was not free from a love of romance and mystery. I

imagined all sorts of possible solutions to the problem, but none seemed probable. As I silently crept into my bedroom that night, however, I determined that I would solve the matter to the very bottom and understand what it all meant.

CHAPTER III.

How the Mist Thickened.

"Robert," said my father, the following morning, "I am very sorry I had to tell you what I did yesterday. I had always looked forward to your twenty-first birthday as a grand time in your life. I intended inviting a lot of people, and having all sorts of merriment, but I felt it would be a farce to do so when at any time you might be turned out of your home."

I did not reply, partly because there seemed nothing to say, and partly because my mind was filled with my last night's experience.

"I know it's hard on you," my father continued, "as you know you've not been home much. What with visiting your Uncle Jack at Tresillian, and being away at school longer than most young fellows, you didn't know how things were going. Besides, I have always hoped that matters would take a turn, and that by the time you were twenty-one

everything would be straight, so that you might begin life well. But there, I have done my best, and it has turned out badly."

"But wouldn't Uncle Jack have lent you the money, father?" I asked. "Surely it would be better to go to him than to strangers."

"No. You see, Jack and I haven't always got on well together. Besides that, he was deadly opposed to my speculating. He told me I was ruining your prospects, and sacrificing the land which had been in the family for generations. Of course, I laughed at him, and we have had high words about the matter, but it has turned out that he is right. I think I might have borrowed money from him, giving the stock as a security, but I didn't wish him to know that things were so bad."

"And how long since you mortgaged Rosecarrol to Tamblin?" I asked.

"Oh, it's been done by bits. Tamblin took over the whole thing about a year ago. It was just after he took 'The Queen's Head.'"

"But supposing Tamblin should want to call in his money," I asked, "wouldn't some one else advance it? Could you not transfer the deeds?"

My father shook his head. "I've been through the whole business, my boy," he said, sadly. "I consulted Lawyer Coad about it, and he says that no one would advance as much as Tamblin has done, while they would require a far higher rate of interest."

"And the mines, father, may they not turn out well after all?"

"I've got a thousand pounds lying dead in East Polgooth mine, my boy, and the thing is knocked. Nobody would give me sixpence in the pound for what I have invested."

"And is there any danger of Tamblin calling in his money at once?"

"He's been giving me hints, Bob. The other day he told me he thought of buying Trewint from young Tom Nicolls, and then only yesterday morning, before I had this talk with you, he told me that two or three fellows were wanting his daughter, and he had promised her £3,000 as a fortune. I know what it means—he either wants the money or else he wants to own Rosecarrol out and out."

"He never shall," I said, grimly.

My father looked pleased, but he only said, "How can you manage to stop him,

Bob? The only way I can think of is that you must marry money."

"Who can I marry that has the money?" I asked, feeling ashamed of myself as I put the question.

"Times are bad, and ready-money is anything but plentiful," my father replied, slowly. Then, as if with an effort, he blurted out, "Have you seen Tamblin's maid, my boy?"

I had felt sure, ever since the day before, what was in his mind, and I knew, too, that only pride had kept him from mentioning her name.

"Yes," I replied, "I've seen her."

"When?" he asked. "I know that you never put your foot inside a public-house, while on Sundays you always go to Laneast, and she, when she goes anywhere, goes to Bolventor. I've asked you to go to Bolventor, but you wouldn't."

"Father," I said, and I felt the blush of shame rise to my face, "if I were to marry Kezia Tamblin, would it make you safe? Would Rosecarrol be ours—would mother be saved from the misery of being turned out of the home she loves?"

"It would, Robert, my son," replied my father, in a hoarse voice.

"And do you think she would marry me, father?"

"She has seen you two or three times, but there's several young farmers who would be only too glad to have her."

"Seen me! Where?"

"At Altarnun harvest festival for once. She was struck with you."

"How do you know?" I asked, a little bit flattered, but a great deal more ashamed.

"She told her father, and Tamblin——" My father hesitated.

"And have you and Tamblin been talking about this matter?" I asked, angrily.

"Bob, my boy," said my father, eagerly, "I wanted to do for the best. I'm thinking about your future, my boy, and about your mother, too. It would kill me if—if——" My father hesitated, and walked to and fro the room. "She's by no means a bad girl," he added, falteringly.

It went to my heart to think of my father sacrificing his pride, and doing what I knew would be hateful to him in order to avert the calamity he dreaded. Then I remembered Kezia Tamblin as I had seen her the night before, and the prospect did not seem so terrible. I was young and susceptible to a woman's influence, and while I did not

love her, I thought of her as a buxom, dimple-cheeked, good-looking young woman. Besides, she had money, and by marrying her I should lift the awful incubus of debt from my father's shoulders, I should save my mother from pain, and I should secure my own position.

"She might refuse to have me," I said, as I thought of the way she had treated me the night before.

"Try, Bob," said my father, eagerly, "try."

I did not reply, but walked out into the yard. The clouds of mist had lifted from the moors, and I must confess that Rosecarrol never looked so fair to me as it looked that morning. The corn had all been cut and carried, while what we called "the Mowey" was filled with great ricks, or stacks of hay and corn. Away in the distance I saw the men ploughing in the fields, while the well-fed cattle and sheep mouthed the autumn grass eagerly. Then I looked towards the house. My mother's bedroom window was opened. It was one of her "good mornings," and she sat near the window and looked out across the meadows to the great wide moors beyond.

I had been in to see her that morning as

I had always done when at home, so that I might speak to her before going out for the day; but this morning I could not help going back to her again.

I will not repeat our conversation, for it ill accords with my feelings, neither would it interest my readers, but that conversation made me desire more than ever to sacrifice anything in order to keep Rosecarrol.

At dinner father and I sat alone, for while we often had our meals with the servants in the long kitchen, there were times when we preferred being together in what we called the "front kitchen," a room used as a sitting room and library.

"Well, Bob?" said my father, questioningly.

"Do you know much about Peter Sleeman?" I asked, instead of replying to the question I knew he longed to ask.

"Nobody does," replied my father. "His father and he were always quarrelling, and when he was about two-and-twenty he ran away from Dreardowns. He was away for nearly twenty years. What he was doing during that time nobody knows. Some say he was a soldier, some that he was a sailor, while others hint that he went to the bad altogether and took to very questionable

pursuits. Anyhow, he came back to Dreardowns ten years ago, just after you went to Probus School, and soon after his father died, leaving everything to him. As you know, he is not married, and no one cares much about having anything to do with him."

I knew most of this in a vague way before, but I wanted to have my father's opinion about him. I had an idea that he might help me to solve the mystery which had gathered around the house.

"Why do you ask, Bob?" said my father.

"I have often wondered," I replied, vaguely. "I suppose he's well off, isn't he?"

"No one knows. Some think his father had a good deal of money, and thus left him a rich man, while others think that he had a lot of debts when he came back to Dreardowns, and that he's had a hard pull to pay them off. But, as I said, no one knows. He's not a man I care to have anything to do with. He has no conscience and sticks at nothing."

"Wasn't there some story about his father dying in a strange way?" I asked.

"There are many who believed Peter got him out of the way in order to get his money. But old Dr. Maynard signed the

certificate, so nothing could be said. But people's tongues wagged a good deal. He was always a bad one. He was called 'ould Peter Sleeman' when he was only twenty, because of his curious ways. He has always looked old and ugly. If you think of getting money out of him, Bob, give it up. The devil himself couldn't be worse to deal with."

I did not undeceive my father concerning my thoughts about Peter Sleeman. Somehow, I could not bring myself to tell him what I had seen, and yet my mind was constantly reverting to the strange sight I had seen at Dreardowns on the previous night.

About five o'clock I went away over the moors towards Dreardowns alone, and reached a point which gave me a view of the house, while there was yet sufficient light to see it plainly. Never, until that moment, did I realise what a lonely place it was. The house, as I said, was so built that you had to come close to it before seeing it. A few fir trees grew around it, while the farm buildings were in close proximity. But there was only one other dwelling-house near, and that was the cottage of the farm workman. Look whichever way I would there was no sign of human life. Close to the farm buildings were, perhaps, forty or fifty acres of culti-

vated land, but all around was a dreary stony waste. A number of undersized sheep picked their way among the rocks on the lonely moors, while a few cattle fed in the cultivated fields, but beyond that I heard and saw nothing.

"Perhaps," I thought, "Peter Sleeman will be in the house. It must be about their supper time now. "I'll try and find out."

Carefully I drew near to the farmstead, and looked intently, but no one was visible, while the place was as silent as death.

"Was that girl forced to go there?" I wondered. "What is the meaning of such a proceeding? Isn't it my duty to tell of what I have seen? May there not be foul play in the matter?"

But I could not bring myself to think of this. What would these country people do? Simply gossip. If I told the parish policeman, he would probably do what was altogether wrong.

Hidden by a hedge, I watched the front of the house until the light was nearly gone, and I was thinking whether I could not invent some business errand in order to see Peter, when the front door opened and a woman came out on the little garden plot.

It was the same woman I had seen the previous night. I had only caught a passing glimpse of her then in the flickering light of the lantern, but I recognised her. She was a woman of perhaps fifty years of age, by no means bad-looking, and very neatly dressed. Her clothes, I was sure, were not made by a country dressmaker; to my rustic eyes they looked graceful and stylish.

She walked slowly around the garden as if in deep thought," while often she lifted her eyes to the window above her head as if to keep watch?"

"That young girl was brought as a prisoner," I thought, "and she is still there. What is the meaning of it?"

But there seemed no answer to my question. The woman remained in the garden for half-an-hour, constantly walking about, and constantly lifting her eyes to the window; then, when daylight had quite gone, she opened the door, and crept silently into the house.

I still waited, and listened for the sound of voices, but heard nothing. Presently, however, I saw a light gleam from the window towards which the woman had been looking, but I could see nothing, for the calico blind, which was fastened to a roller,

was pulled down, thus hiding everything from my sight.

A few minutes later, and it was quite dark, but I still remained, and presently my heart beat loudly, for behind the blind I detected two forms. They were indistinct, however, for the light in the room was by no means bright, while the spot on which I stood was much lower than the ground floor of the house even, but I was sure they were female forms, while I thought I distinguished them as the woman I had seen in the garden and her prisoner. Twice they passed by the window, and then I heard the sound of voices; the one stern and dictatorial, the other at first pleading, and then sobbing.

I had a difficulty in restraining myself. Every bit of romance in my nature was aroused by the thought of a young girl imprisoned, and perhaps cruelly treated, in that lonely house. But what could I do? I had no right to interfere. I had no sufficient grounds for taking definite action. Perhaps the fact of her presence there under such a guard was perfectly justifiable, and that if I interfered I should be doing harm instead of good. This method of reasoning, however, did not satisfy me. I felt sure something was wrong. Else why those screams and

struggles in the carriage? why the strange behaviour of the men who had escorted her there? why a nocturnal journey, which those men evidently wished to be unknown?

Presently the sound of voices ceased, and again a deathly silence pervaded the house; so, feeling I could do nothing, I turned away and wandered aimlessly across the moors. For a long time I thought of what I had seen and heard, and wondered how I should be able to discover the meaning of it all, and as I wondered my desire to know became stronger. So eager was I in forming plans, that for a time I forgot that I had promised to go to "The Queen's Head" that night, forgot the other plans which were intended to lift the burden of care from my father's shoulders, as well as from my own.

At length, however, it all came back to my mind, and I turned my face towards Besuddle. I had not gone far when I saw a ghostly-looking form crossing the moor, and, in spite of the education I had received, I could not repress a shudder. For, as most people know, the Cornish folk are very superstitious, and, added to this, it was whispered among the folk Peter Sleeman's father often came back from his grave and haunted the lonely moors, as if to bemoan his untimely death.

All ghostly fears were soon dispelled, however. The familiar clink of a horse's hoofs upon the stones scattered over the moors suggested the fact of a farmer returning home. A minute later I saw that the horse's rider was no other than Peter Sleeman, and, the night being clear, I saw that he was attired in a respectable suit of clothes. This was unusual for Peter. Some said that for five years he had never donned anything but his working clothes, so I felt sure he had something important on hand.

"Good night, Mr. Sleeman," I said.

"Who be you?" he asked, gruffly, riding up close to me. "Oh, I see—young Tremain. Where be you off to?"

"I'm going to Besuddle, Mr. Sleeman. It's rather lonely at Rosecarrol, and I'm going for a bit of company. I suppose it is quiet at Dreardowns, too?"

"Yes, we have nobody there," he said, gruffly.

"I suppose not. I was thinking only to-day I would like to have a look at your mowey. Have your corn crops been good this year?"

"Only middlin'. There's nothin' at Dreardowns for a young fellow like you to come and see. Chaps like you want to go where

there's wimmen. I ain't got noan at my place, except old Gracey Grigg, who was 'ousekipper for father, and she's sixty ef she's a day."

"But she can't do all the work, can she?"

"Well, my hine, Bill Best, es married, and his wife do come up sometimes, but they'm the only wimmen that do ever come to Dreardowns."

"Well, no one can say you are overmuch burdened with the society of women, Mr. Sleeman. But have you no friends or relations that come to see you?"

"Nobody. There ain't a bin a livin' soul but they inside my 'ouse since 'arvest, and that's six weeks agone. I doan't want nobody, nuther. Mine esn't a plaace for people to come to. Good night."

Knowing what I did, Peter's words more than ever confirmed my suspicions; neither could I drive them from my mind as I trudged towards "The Queen's Head."

A few minutes later Hezekiah Tamblin was shaking me heartily by the hand, while his daughter Keziah, as she met me, told me with a giggle that she had "amoast gived me up, thinkin' as 'ow I was like moast young men, and didn' kip my word."

Somehow the moral atmosphere of "The

Queen's Head" was different from that of Rosecarrol; it was different, too, from that which I could not help associating with the prisoner at Dreardowns; and yet I remained like one charmed, and when I left Kezia Tamblin that night I felt her warm kiss burning on my cheek.

CHAPTER IV.

The Face at Dreardowns' Window.

For the next month I think I was bewitched. I spent a good deal of my time at "The Queen's Head." Kezia Tamblin always gave me a warm welcome when I went, while I was more and more eager to go as the days went by. For the first few days I felt a kind of shame in visiting her. I knew, in spite of all I could tell myself, that I was making love to her just to keep Rosecarrol; and although I knew I should be saving my mother from untold pain in doing this, I dared not tell her of the step I was taking. Somehow I felt sure that mother could never welcome Kezia. It is true she was handsome, she was wealthy—that is, according to our ideas of wealth in that part of the country—but she was coarse. Perhaps I should not have felt this so much if I had not known and loved my mother; but she had given me high ideals of what a woman ought to be, and when I discovered that Kezia did not

fulfil those ideals I was saddened. But this did not last long. Somehow her robust health and animal spirits made me forget my dreams. I thought less and less about my boyish fancies, and gave myself over to the pleasure of the moment. She was good-looking, she was wealthy, and she was very fond of me, so what could I want more?

So much enamoured with her did I become that I forgot the mystery at Sleeman's house, or, if I thought of it, I did not feel sufficient interest in it to take any further steps in the matter. Kezia claimed all my spare time and attention; Kezia's warm, soft arms would be placed around my neck to welcome me whenever I came; and so I forgot the things I should otherwise remember. And so my passion—for I cannot call it love—grew day by day, until Hezekiah Tamblin regarded the marriage between us as settled.

"Robert, my boy," he said one night, confidentially, "this es a providental arrangement; that's wot et es. You've got the naame, and the breedin', and Kezia hev got the money to kip et up. I was lucky in California, oncommon lucky, my booy, and I used to tell mezelf that when I got 'ome Kezia shud be a laady. I da conseder yours to be the best family in the parish, Robert,

Law, you'll be a magistrate some day. You're a cute chap, and you'll make Rosecarrol into the grandest plaace in the county. Tell 'ee, I wanted things to be like this a long time afore I knawd 'ee, else I shudden a bin willin' to lend so much money to yer vather. But 'tes oal right. I'm glad you and Kezia hev valled in love weth aich other."

"Does Kezia know that my father owes you money?" I asked.

"Never you mind that, my boy. 'Father,' ses she to me, after she'd come 'ome from Arternun 'arvest festival, ses she, 'ef ther's a young man I shud like to have 'tes young Robert Tremain.' Oa, 'tes oal right, Robert."

I must confess that this did not make me very comfortable, but just then Kezia came in, and then I forgot what a coarse man her father was.

A fortnight after I had first seen her at "The Queen's Head," Kezia Tamblin was talked about among the country folk as "Robert Termaain's maid," while Hezekiah Tamblin was heard to say that his "intended son-in-law was the finest young man in the county."

A month after I had first seen her I went

with her to see her aunt who lived at Linkinhorne, and Kezia introduced me to her as her intended husband. I suppose she meant nothing indelicate when she did this, and I am sure she felt very loving towards me; but somehow it hurt me, and I am afraid I was not very good company that night.

I think she felt that something was wrong, for as we were going home she asked me if I were cross.

"Certainly not, Kezia," I replied.

"And you do love me, Robert?" she said; "doan't 'ee now? I would die for you, Robert," and she caught my arm and held it fast.

"Of course, Kezia," said I, and at that moment I felt I was speaking the truth.

"Because," said she, and her voice became curiously intense, "I could not do without you now."

"Couldn't you really, Kezia?" I said; "do you love me so?"

"Love you!" she cried, and she lifted my hand to her mouth and covered it with kisses. "Ef any woman was to try and take you from me I would kill 'er."

"Nonsense, Kezia," I said, with a nervous laugh.

"It may be nonsense," she replied, "but

I wud. I've got 'ee, Robert, and nobody shall 'ave 'ee but me. When be 'ee goin' to take me to Rosecarrol and shaw me to yer mother?"

"Soon," I said, with an uneasy feeling in my heart.

"I knaw I bean't so well brought up as you be," she said, passionately. "I knaw that father used to be a farm labbut, but I love you, Robert, and I feel mad when I see 'ee spaikin' to another maid. You doan't want nobody but me, do 'ee?"

"No one, Kezia," and I spoke the truth.

"And if ever you do want anybody else, as I said, I'm sure I should kill the maid that took away yer love. I used to laugh when I read about sich things in story-books, but I doan't now. I didn' knaw what it was to care 'bout anybody then. Kiss me, Robert, and tell me you'll never love anybody else."

I kissed her, and told her not to fear, but there was a strange feeling in my heart all the same.

That evening, after I left her, I could not help thinking about what she had said. I was held to her by a strange fascination, and yet even then I knew that she had never stirred my higher nature. The love which held me was the love of the brute rather than

the angel, while I felt that my manhood was not uplifted by visiting "The Queen's Head." When I went there at first, I felt a kind of loathing for the inmates of the bar-parlour, with their coarse jokes and ribald songs; but now the loathing was gone, while I often caught myself eagerly listening to their conversation.

All this was passing through my mind when I met Peter Sleeman. He was riding away from Dreardowns, and he was attired in the same clothes he wore when I last saw him. It was now seven o'clock, but the middle of November had come, and thus daylight had quite gone. At times, however, the moon shone out from between the black clouds, enabling me to see plainly.

He nodded to me as he went by, and gave a surly grunt.

"I wonder where Peter is going," I said to myself, and then an intense desire came into my heart to go to Dreardowns. As I said, the company of Kezia Tamblin had driven away all thoughts of Dreardowns and its mysterious inmates. For the past month I had been in a sort of dreamland, and if flattery and demonstrated affection could make one happy, I had been happy.

I had never spoken to any one about the

incident I have related, however. Somehow I felt incapable of telling any one about that pale face which bore such a look of agony. I could not describe the meeting on the moors when a woman's cry had aroused my curiosity. Sometimes during that month I had felt that I ought to take definite steps towards finding out its meaning, but something kept me back.

After meeting Peter Sleeman, however, and remembering what he had said the last time I had seen him, I had, as I said, a strong desire to go to Dreardowns again. I fancied all sorts of wild, improbable things. I pictured the woman I had seen walking in the garden treating her prisoner with barbarous cruelty; I thought of the pale young girl suffering untold anguish, as she remained a prisoner in the dreary house.

Almost involuntarily I turned my face towards Peter Sleeman's dwelling, and then hurried thither without questioning what possible good I could do. It was yet early in the evening, so I determined to get behind the garden fence, from whence I had seen the woman about whom I had been so greatly puzzled. I had no difficulty in reaching this spot unobserved. Not a soul stirred, and at that time a cloud hid the light of the moon, so that the darkness was great. I looked

over the fence between the scanty bushes towards the window of the room to which the young girl had been taken, and saw that the blind had not been pulled down. The room was very dim; probably it was only illumined by a candle. I looked eagerly, but could see nothing within the apartment.

A few minutes later, however, a brighter light gleamed from the window; then I saw the elderly woman bring a lamp and place it near the window. I could discern her features plainly, and I thought I saw a bored, weary look on her face. I saw, too, that she moved away listlessly, as though she were tired.

Close beside me was a fir-tree, and, acting on the impulse of the moment, I climbed up to the first branch, a distance of perhaps ten feet. From this position, in spite of several thick iron bars which had been placed across the window, and which made escape seemingly impossible, I could see the interior of the room, could see every article of furniture. It was not a bedroom, but fitted up as a sitting-room. I saw an easy-chair, a narrow, uncomfortable couch, and two cane-seated chairs. The floor was covered with cocoa-nut matting, while on the walls were hung a few cheap prints. A dull, miserable-looking

fire smouldered in the grate. Altogether, the room, for a farmhouse, was not badly furnished.

Presently my heart gave a bound, for I saw the young girl enter. At first I could not see her features plainly, for she walked to and fro the room, and thus turned only the side of her face towards me. By-and-by, however, she came to the window and looked out. I was only twenty feet from her, while the branch of the tree on which I stood placed me on a level with the room in which she was. I saw her plainly now. The light of the lamp revealed every feature. She remained a long time, too, looking steadfastly out into the darkness.

I shall never forget to my dying day the feeling which came over me as I watched. What caused it I can scarcely describe even now. Perhaps it was the look in her eyes, perhaps——, but let me describe her appearance as well as I can, just as I saw her that November night.

She did not look more than twenty, perhaps barely that. In the lamplight both her hair and eyes looked as black as the raven's wing, the former being tossed in curling tresses back from her forehead, and the latter shining like stars. I learned afterwards that

"She remained a long time, looking steadfastly out into the darkness."—Page 54.

neither were her hair or eyes black, but a rich dark brown. Her face was very pale; it looked unhealthy in the pale lamplight, but the features were to me more beautiful than any I had ever seen.

I looked long and steadfastly, and as I looked I realised that the dream of my life was fulfilled. I saw the fulfilment of my heart's desire; I saw one whom I felt sure responded to the deepest cravings of my heart.

But oh the sadness, the utter hopeless misery that rested on her features! Never before did I think that eyes could reveal such unutterable longing as hers revealed! Never did I think a face could tell such a story as hers told!

It was with difficulty that I refrained from jumping to the ground, going into the house, and demanding her liberty. I soon realised the foolishness of such an act, however. My new-found love gave me discretion, I think, and told me to be wise. For the throbbing of my heart, the hunger of my soul told me that I did love her, that I should love her until my heart ceased to beat, until the wheels of my life stood still.

The world became changed to me from that moment. Everything had a new mean-

ing. In a true, deep sense, "old things had passed away, and all things had become new." I had heard the preachers tell about being born into a new life, and I felt that this new life had come to me.

I did not know who she was; at that moment the thought did not trouble me. I had seen her. I knew that the light which shone from her eyes was pure; I saw nobility stamped upon her face. She appealed to all that was pure and true within me, and I loved her with all the fulness of my life.

At that moment I never thought of the companionship I had formed, never thought of the fact that I had been ready to barter my soul for a mess of pottage. I remembered only that I was looking into the face of the one woman in the world, and that my heart burned as if there were great fires within me.

Joy! Until that moment I did not know the meaning of the word! For the first time I understood the language of the poets I had read when at school, and who had taught that love was heaven.

How long she stood looking out into the night I know not. It might be only minutes, it might be hours, but all the time, as I watched her, I thought of plans whereby I might let her know that she was not uncared

for; I pondered over means whereby I might set her at liberty.

Presently I saw her give a start; then she looked around her as if afraid, while a look of pain shot across her face. I saw her no more that night, however, for she hastily pulled down the blind, and from that time it seemed to me as though the night were darker and the scene more drear.

Just at that moment, too, I heard the sound of a horse's hoofs, and then I felt sure that she had a reason for leaving the window. She was afraid of being seen, perhaps, or it might be that she expected news from the outside world. At the sound of the horse's hoofs I turned, and from my hiding-place saw Peter Sleeman ride up. I heard him muttering to himself as he stabled his horse, and then, as he made his way towards the farmhouse door, I distinctly heard him utter these words, "I'll know more about this business to-night."

He stood for a few seconds by the door, as though he hesitated to enter; then he said, slowly, "There's more in it than there seems, but *I will* know."

A moment later he was within the house, the house that contained a treasure dearer to me than all the world besides.

Without hesitating a second, I slipped down from the tree, and made my way to the back part of the house. I saw a light in the back-kitchen window, towards which I went, and hid myself in an angle of the house, from which I could see the room plainly. As every Cornish countryman knows, especially those who have lived in the neighbourhood of which I am writing, the back kitchen is a room mostly used by farm servants. It is anything but elegantly furnished. Generally all that is to be seen is a deal table, a wooden settle, a form, and two or three three-legged stools. This room was no exception to the rule. There was no window-blind fastened to the window, and had there been, it would not, in all probability, have been drawn. Where there are no neighbours country people trouble but little about such things.

On the table a tallow candle flickered, while beside the peat fire in the huge open chimney-place crooned an old woman. Peter Sleeman stood not far from her, looking uglier, I think, than ever I had seen him before.

"Hello, Graacey," he shouted, "you bean't gone to bed, then?"

"No, Pitter, no. I thot I'd jist wait till

you comed 'ome, my deaar. Oa tes fine an' loanly."

"I spoase Liza Best hev bin up?"

"Iss, but she've bin gon an hour or more—ever since Bill comed up to give the bullocks ther straw, and bed 'em down for the night."

"And ain't Mrs. Foxey a bin 'ere toal?"

"No, she's bin slaipin', I reckon."

"And the maid?"

"I ain't a zid her."

"Ugh! Well, you go to bed now."

"What?"

"Go to bed! Caan't 'ee 'ear? I be hollin' to 'ee like a hedger. You be as deef as a addick, and be gittin' deefer every day."

The old woman hobbled off to bed, muttering to herself as she went, while Peter stood looking into the peat fire.

"I'll have her down," he said presently; "I'll know more 'bout this business. I will, ther now!"

He hesitated a few seconds, as though in doubt, then he went to the foot of the stairs and called aloud, "Mrs. Foxey."

"Yes, Mr. Sleeman."

"'Ere, I want 'ee."

"All right, I'm coming."

A minute later, the woman of whom I have spoken before came into the room.

"I want to have a talk weth 'ee, Mrs. Foxey," said Peter Sleeman, with a nervous giggle.

"Allow me to tell you again, Mr. Sleeman, that my name is not Foxey, but Foxwell."

"Au, well, 'tes all the same to me, my deear. Look 'ere, I want to knaw more about this maid bisness, and wot's more, I'm goin' to knaw."

Eagerly I drew nearer to the window, so as not to miss a word.

CHAPTER V.

The Conversation Between Peter Sleeman and Mrs. Foxwell.

It may be thought that I was scarcely acting an honourable part in listening, but in looking back, I do not feel that I was wrong. I felt that evil was being done; I was sure that injustice was rife, and that in fathoming the designs of those who wrought the evil, I was justified in taking this course. Besides, my heart was on fire. The intense longing, ay, the misery expressed on that young girl's face nerved me to do anything, while the love which grew stronger at each beat of my heart would admit of no obstacle.

And yet did I not compromise with my love, and thus?—but I will speak of that presently; let me tell my story now, as best I can.

The night had become quite dark now. No longer were there blue patches in the sky. From the north-east a great black

cloud had arisen which covered the whole heavens, and I knew by the moaning of the wind as it swept over the moors that a storm was coming on. That fact, however, did not trouble me. I was intent on hearing what the woman whom Peter Sleeman had called Mrs. Foxey had to say to him.

"There is nothing I have to tell you, Mr. Sleeman," I heard Mrs. Foxwell say.

"Iss, there es, my deear," said Peter, with a leer. "Come now, I'm goin' to knaw." And he went to the chimney-place and stirred up the fire.

"'Tes gittin' awful cowld, my deear," he continued. "Ther', now, I'll put some 'ood (wood) on, an' pull up the settle, too. Ther' now, zet down and we'll have a good crake (talk) 'bout this."

"I've nothing to tell you, Mr. Sleeman," she repeated.

"Then I sh'll 'ave summin' to tell to people," responded Peter, with an ugly look.

He threw some furze sticks on the fire, which caught into a blaze, and then, pulling up the settle, he sat down, while Mrs. Foxwell sat on a stool near. I could see them plainly, and the wind not being yet risen,

and one of the panes of glass being broken, I could hear them plainly.

"Come now," said Sleeman, "ould Graacey es gone to bed, so nobody can 'ear. What do et oal main?"

"I tell you, Mr. Sleeman, I don't know. I'm as much in the dark as you are. You are paid for keeping her here, I am paid for taking care of her. That is all."

Peter gave an unsatisfied grunt; then he said, sharply: "But you started weth her from the beginnin', you must knaw 'bout that. All I got was a letter axin' me to take a young person privately, and to keep her in strict secrecy. Now, that may be all very well. I'm paid very well for it, but it might pay me better—iss, and pay us boath better, ef we was to git the rights of it, and help 'tother side."

"No, it wouldn't."

"How do 'ee knaw?"

"She hasn't a penny, never had a penny. She remembers all about her past. She has always been poor. She is perfectly in the dark as to what it all means."

"I doan knaw nothin' 'bout that," said Peter, slowly. "But you must be luny to think that any Trelaske in this world es

agoin' to do a thing like this without ther's good raison."

"Mr. Edgar is very deep," said Mrs. Foxwell, thoughtfully.

"Deep! deep as the bottomless pit," said Peter, savagely. "They all be. I was sarvent to th' oull Colonel, I was, and well I knawd it. Tell 'ee he *was* deep, and so when I gits a letter from young Edgar askin' me to kip a maid 'ere in privacy, to taake her in at night, and not to laive anybody knaw that she was 'ere, I knawd there was summin on foot. The maid may knaw nothin' 'bout it, but I tell 'ee there's summin in the wind. Look 'ere, 'ow ded *you* git on this 'ere job?"

"I was maid to Mrs. Trelaske," she replied.

"What, th' oull Colonel's wife?"

"Yes."

"Then you had a purty time ov et, I reckon."

"Anyhow, I was her maid; when she died I got married."

"What, to Foxey?"

"To Mr. Foxwell. He was coachman in the old Colonel's days. He took a public-house afterwards, and took to gambling."

"Iss, that's the way ov 'em."

"Well, when he died a few months ago, he left me without a penny."

"Iss, what then?"

"I started a dressmaking business in Plymouth, but I got on badly. I couldn't get a connection worth anything, so when I got a message from Mr. Edgar asking me to do this, I consented."

"And tha's all you knaw?"

"Ye-es."

Peter looked at her suspiciously.

"And he took you because you was a woman to be depended on," he said, with a leer; "and he comed to me because this es the moast God-forsaken spot in the country. We'm twelve mile from everywhere, and there edn't 'ardly a 'ouse for a mile round 'ere, and nobody do come 'ere. He do knaw that I was never one to talk, and he do knaw, too, that I doan't make friends weth people. Iss, I've seed et oal. But, Mrs. Foxey, we must find out 'bout this."

"We can't."

"Have you pumped the maid 'bout her history?"

"I've asked her questions. But she will tell me nothing. Either there is nothing to tell, or she distrusts me. But I am sure from what she says that she's been poor."

"Um! la me see, she's called Joyce, ed'n she?"

"Yes, Joyce Patmore."

"Patmore, Patmore—no, I caan't think of anybody I knaw by that name. Have she tould 'ee where she lived, and what she used to do?"

"No, she will tell me nothing. I wish there was an end to this. I'm tired of it. I'm wearied to death of this dismal place. I've seen nobody for a month, and I can't bear it."

"Tha's nothin' wuth talkin' 'bout, Mrs. Foxey, my deear. I knaw you had trouble in gittin' her 'ere; didn't 'ee?"

"I got into the carriage at Plymouth. Mr. Edgar was there, and the other man that came on here. She was just like one in a trance. We got out at Doublebois, a little roadside station, and one of the dreariest places you can conceive of; there are woods all around, and not a house near."

"Iss, I knaw it. Well?"

"Well, we found the carriage waiting. Mr. Edgar told the porter, a thick-headed fellow that collected the tickets, that the lady was ill. He was too stupid to think of asking questions, and so we got into the carriage that was waiting for us, and drove

across the dreariest part of the country in the world."

"Iss, I knaw it. She waked up, didn't she?"

"Yes, twice; but Mr. Edgar gave her something to smell and she went off again. We had most trouble just before we got here. An awful mist came over the moors, and we didn't know which way to come, but Mr. Edgar found out by inquiring of a farm-servant, and then told him we would go on to Altarnun."

"Iss, I heard 'bout it. Edgar told me. She squalled and struggled a good bit, ded'n' she?"

"Yes—and that's all."

"We must find out, Mrs. Foxey."

"If we do we shall lose our pay, and do no good."

"She seems more tractable now, doan't she?"

"Yes, she seems to have settled into a sort of stupor. At first she was passionate, and I suspected that she was trying to devise means of getting away. Now she just sits all day, and says nothing. For my part, I believe she'll either go mad or die."

"Mr. Edgar doan't want her to die, do 'a?"

"No; I must give her a little more liberty, I think. She doesn't know where she is at all."

"How do 'ee knaw?"

"By her questions. Once she asked me if we were in Somersetshire, another time she asked if these were the Dartmoors."

"I doan't like doin' things in the dark," said Peter, reflectively. "Still, not a soul ain't the laistest idea that anybody's 'ere: that es, 'cept ould Graacey, and she's safe enough."

"Yes; but all this makes it hard for me. I've always to be on the watch. I've no liberty at all. I've had to lock the door in order to come away now. I shall write to Mr. Edgar to send someone else to help me."

"Then ther'll have to be mait for another," said Peter, "and that'll main a pound a week more for me, mind that."

"I think he's paying all he cares to pay."

"But I'll make 'em. I'll threaten to tell."

"And if you do, you'll rue it."

"How?"

"Why, if he's done wrong, so have we. If he's done anything for which he can be punished, so have we. We should be imprisoned as his accomplices."

An ugly look came into his eyes, and he

seemed to be about to speak when the woman started up.

"There, she's moving," she said. "I hear her steps overhead. There, she's walking to and fro the room. The window is barred, and she would have to come down these stairs in order to get out, but I'll go up and see."

She left the room hastily, while Peter sat staring into the fire. Presently he started up, and then sat down again. At that moment Mrs. Foxwell returned.

"She was walking in her sleep, I think," she said, in an excited tone of voice. "She was going to and fro the room, her eyes wide open and seeing nothing. She took no notice of me, but went on whispering to herself. I tell you, she'll go mad or die. She's getting very weak."

"You must take her for a walk over the moors to-morrow," said Peter. "Take her Brown Willy way, there ed'n a house that way for more'n two mile. Go out jist afore Bill Best do come to tie up the cows, and come back 'bout six o'clock. It'll be a chaange for both of 'ee."

"I think I will," she said, quietly.

"And afterwards," said Peter, "we need'n' be like strangers; we can send ould Graacey to bed, and have a chat 'ere together. I

think you be a nice woman," and Peter looked at her amorously.

"Don't be foolish," she said, in not a displeased tone of voice.

"I bean't foolish, Martha—you'm called Martha, bean't 'ee? I was never a woman's man, my deear, though I was in the Artillery after I runned away from vather here. Wimmen dedn' like me. But I like you, you be a nice woman, and a nice-lookin' woman, too. I knaw I bean't much to look at, but I'm wuth a good bit a money, and you and me can make a good bit more out ov this bisness, ef we'm careful, Martha."

"I don't see that. Do you hear the rain? 'Tis an awful night."

"But I do, Martha. And we may so well be comfortable. Give me a kiss now, will 'ee?"

"Nonsense, Mr. Sleeman. Good night."

"But, Martha, now," said Peter, coaxingly, and trying to smile, which made his face uglier than ever, "we may so well be friendly. Give me a kiss."

"Certainly not—why, this is the first time you've spoken civilly to me since I came."

Peter caught her arm, but she slipped from him, left the room, and went upstairs.

I still waited, wondering what Peter would do. I was cramped and cold, and the rain had drenched me to the skin; but I cared nothing for that. A young farmer thinks nothing of wet clothes—besides, I was not in a state of mind to trouble about such things. The young girl's pleading eyes haunted me, and I longed with a great longing to set her free.

Peter looked steadily into the fire, sucking a black clay pipe as he did so. Several times he gave a low chuckle, as if pleasant thoughts were passing through his mind. But he said nothing that I could hear, and presently he took the candle and left the room.

I felt nothing of the beating rain as I went over the moors towards Rosecarrol; I thought of nothing but the young girl who had entered my life, and of the conversation to which I had listened. Kezia Tamblin was only a name, while the danger of losing Rosecarrol never troubled me at all.

"Joyce! Joyce Patmore!" I cried aloud; "do not be afraid, Joyce, you shall be free! You have a friend, a lover, Joyce, although you know it not! Don't be afraid, Joyce, I will help you!"

I repeated her name over and over again. I called her all sorts of endearing names.

I laughed aloud and listened while the sounds died away in the moaning of the wind.

Presently I seemed to enter into the spirit of the wild night; there was something akin to me in the great stretch of the moors, and in the sobbing of the storm as it swept onward. I heard her name everywhere—a thousand voices seemed to tell me that I must deliver her from her prison, that I must solve the riddle of her life.

"And I will—I will, Joyce, my beautiful," I cried. "Come what will, I will help you, Joyce; I will set you free, my darling, for I love you! I love you! Do you hear, Joyce, I love you!"

Then the winds roared around me as though they understood, and the moor-birds cried as though they were witnesses to the vow I had made.

As I drew nearer Rosecarrol, however, a new mood came over me. A great darkness seemed to rest on everything, and the wild winds, instead of speaking words of cheer and hope, only breathed the wail of despair, while the beating rain gave only sullen moans. But my heart beat warm with love through it all; and I saw Joyce's face and Joyce's eyes everywhere, and I determined

that, come what might, she should be free, and she should be happy.

I know that this may seem foolish to those who have never caught the spirit of a stormy night, nor been torn with conflicting thoughts as I was torn, but I have told the truth nevertheless, just as what follows is true, strange though it may seem.

CHAPTER VI.

How Matters Came to a Crisis.

When I drew near to Rosecarrol I saw that a light was in the room to which my father repaired when he had any writing to do. I think I have mentioned that sometimes we called it the sitting-room and sometimes the library. To my surprise, my father met me.

"Robert, my boy," he said, when I entered, "you've had a wet night to come from courting. It's a rough walk over the moors, too. I should think," he continued, with a nervous, apologetic sort of laugh, "that you'll want to end it soon, and—and settle down."

I said nothing, however. Somehow I did not care to tell him that I had not been with Kezia Tamblin since early in the evening, while it was now midnight.

"It is very wet," I said; "I'm soaked to the skin."

"Well, get on some dry clothes; I want to talk a bit," he said. "I've got some hot

milk and egg for 'ee. I told Matilda to get it ready. I suppose you won't have a drop of brandy in it?"

"No," I said, remembering the habit which had been growing upon him, although I must confess he had not drank so much since I had taken up with Kezia Tamblin.

"Well, put on dry clothes, anyhow, and come down here. You see what a good fire I've got."

I was not adverse to this, for I did not feel like going to bed, and the fire certainly looked cheerful. So I quickly changed my wet clothes for dry, and came back to my father.

"You've had supper, I suppose, Bob?"

"I could manage with some of that chicken-pie, anyhow," I replied, for I had eaten nothing since early in the afternoon. So I sat down and ate the chicken-pie; and then I drank the milk and egg, feeling very much better for it, too.

"You've been to 'The Queen's Head' to-night, I suppose, Bob?" said my father.

I nodded.

"Hezekiah Tamblin has been here."

"What for?"

"I sent for him."

"Why?"

"That's what I wanted to speak to you about," said my father, anxiously.

Like one in a dream I sat beside the fire. I was wondering what Joyce Patmore was doing just then. Hezekiah Tamblin's visit was nothing to me.

"You remember that I told you how Rosecarrol was mortgaged for all it was worth to Hezekiah Tamblin?"

"Yes."

"You know, too, that I told you how I had borrowed money on the stock?"

I nodded.

"Well, Lawyer Coad wants his money."

"What money?"

"The money I borrowed from him."

"Oh, I see. You borrowed money from him. I thought you had it all from Tamblin. Well, you say Coad wants his money back?"

I hardly realised what I was saying; for, simple though my father's meaning was, I barely grasped it. My thoughts were elsewhere.

"Yes, Coad wants his money back. I got a letter from him this morning. It's a fairly big sum. I should have to sell off all my stock to pay him, and you can see what that would mean."

His meaning was getting clearer to me, but I did not speak.

"Well, I sent for Tamblin, and asked him to lend me the amount."

"Yes."

"Well, he consents — on condition that——"

"What?"

"That you marry Kezia at once."

I awoke from my dream at his words. I saw clearly now what he had been aiming at; I realised, too, what it meant. At that moment I loathed Kezia Tamblin, I loathed myself for paying her any attentions. By so doing I had blighted my life, I had been untrue to my best self, I had destroyed my chances of ever winning as my wife one for whom every fibre of my being longed. It was with difficulty that I refrained from rising to my feet, denouncing my father's action, and refusing ever to speak to Kezia Tamblin again. At that moment I saw her as I had never seen her before. She was blowsy, vulgar, coarse. She had never appealed to my manhood at all—only to my selfishness, to my lower nature. My new-found love, on the other hand, seemed to me an angel of purity, pointing me upward.

My father, however, never dreamed of the

thoughts which passed through my mind. He went on talking quite calmly.

"You see, Robert, Tamblin is entirely wrapped up in this girl. He is a coarse sort of fellow, but he really loves his daughter, while she is simply crazy about you. It seems she fell in love with you before you ever saw her, and it was she who persuaded him to advance so much money on Rosecarrol. Well, whether Tamblin doubts you or not I can't say, but he says that he'll advance this money on the condition that the wedding takes place at once, and that he'll give her Rosecarrol and this money as a fortune. I tell you, my boy, I don't know where you'd get such another chance. Why, it's as good as—yes, more than five thous——"

"Stop, father," I cried; "stop, I want to think."

"What's the use of thinking?" responded my father. "You've courted the girl for a month, and, as far as I can see, the wedding may as well take place in another three weeks or month as in several months' time. Besides, the whole matter would be settled, and money troubles would be over."

"Have you spoken to mother about it?" I asked.

"Well, she knows you've been courtin'

Kezia. You know she's only anxious about your happiness. Let the wedding come off, and she'll never know anything about money troubles, and she'll be happy in the thought of your joy."

"But couldn't you borrow this money elsewhere, and pay Coad?"

"Why should I?" asked my father. "Tamblin's money is as good as anybody's else. Besides," and my father looked at me suspiciously, "if you try to get out of marryin' Kezia, her father will ruin me in a moment; he will drive us out of the house, and that will kill your mother. If I were to *try* to borrow anywhere else, his suspicions would be aroused, for, mind you, he's no fool, if he is rough and coarse."

"I can't talk any more about it to-night," I said, hurriedly. "I'll let you know to-morrow morning," and I left the room with an unsteady step.

Not one wink of sleep did I get that night; my mind seemed preternaturally awake. And yet I could not think clearly. Everything was mixed up. Sometimes Peter Sleeman and Hezekiah Tamblin were the same persons, while the money difficulties presented a riddle which I could not solve. Before daylight I got up and dressed, and then, after a thorough

sousing of my head in cold water, I was able to grasp the situation in which I was placed.

What should I do? Try and crush my new-found love for the lone maiden of whom I knew nothing, and give up all my plans for rescuing her? No, home or no home, property or no property, I could not do that. Whatever happened, I would set her free, and I would try and win back her rights for her, whatever they might be. But what did this mean? What of Kezia Tamblin? Had I not won her heart, and led her to believe I cared for her? Was it not my duty to fulfil my promises? Besides, if I did not wed her, my home would be sacrificed, while my father and I would be left penniless. And mother! Yes, I was sure it would kill her to know that we were bankrupt and homeless.

Then, again, had I any right to marry Kezia Tamblin when I did not love her—ay, when I was ready to give my life's blood for another? Better poverty,-better death, than a loveless marriage. Should I not sin against this affectionate country girl more by marrying her, when all the time my heart would be yearning for another, than by refusing to be a party to a loveless union?

All this passed through my mind in a hazy,

indistinct sort of way, and as the morning passed away the question remained unsettled.

I determined that I would set Joyce Patmore at liberty, but I could not believe that she could ever care for me. I might love her, but how could she love me? As yet she had never seen me, she did not know of my existence. Still, I was young, and youth is always daring, always hopeful; and although I could not make up my mind what to do, I did not despair but that some course would open up.

A man in a dilemma always seeks a course which, although it seems easiest at the time, is often the most difficult in the long run. I was no exception to the rule, and I tried to procrastinate.

"Father," I said, after I had gone through the farce of pretending to eat my dinner, "when is the latest date that this matter must be settled?"

"The sooner the better," said my father.

"Yes," I replied; "but you see it's very quick. Kezia and I have only been keeping company a month. It's hardly fair that I shall be expected to marry a girl in less than two months after I first knew her."

My father looked at me curiously. "What

do you mean, Robert?" he said. "Things were different when I was your age; I'd a-married your mother in less than a week after we started courtin' if I could. But there, I needn't settle up with Coad for a week, although I promised to see Tamblin again on Friday night."

It was now Tuesday, thus I had three days in which to act. I determined that I would go to Dreardowns again that very night. I remembered what Mrs. Foxwell had said about taking Joyce Patmore over the moors, and made my plans accordingly. Of course, things might be different from what I imagined, but I must be governed by circumstances and do the best I could.

No doubt my plans were clumsy, no doubt that other and cleverer fellows would have arranged better than I, but God knows I did the best I could. As I look back now I can see how I ought to have taken greater care and risked less; indeed, the first step I took might have destroyed all my chances of helping her. Still, as I said, I did my best. I was not accustomed to mystery and intrigue; I had lived my life on the open moors, and that kind of existence does not prepare one for scheming and planning. Still, love makes us wise as well as foolish,

and I loved—Heaven knows I loved Joyce Patmore with all my life.

I knew that Kezia Tamblin expected me at "The Queen's Head" that evening, but directly dusk came on I turned my face towards Dreardowns. I remembered Peter Sleeman's words, "*Take her Brown Willy way, there ed'n a house that way for more'n two mile. Go out jist afore Bill Best do come to tie up the cows, and come back 'bout six o'clock.*"

Of course, this plan might not be carried out, but I determined to be prepared to act upon it. I arrived within sight of Dreardowns just as the light of day was beginning to fade. The sky overhead was grey, but no rain was falling; at any rate, the weather was favourable to walking. Placing myself in a sheltered spot, I watched the house, and presently saw two female forms come out and go in the direction of Brown Willy. As I said, the sky was grey, but the moon being nearly at the full the night would not be very dark. I saw, too, that they followed the cart track which led over the moors, so there would be no danger of their losing their way. Instantly my plans were made. Putting the note I had scribbled just before leaving Rosecarrol in the side pocket of my

coat, I took rather a circuitous route towards the hill, and having reached it saw that the two women walked side by side, Mrs. Foxwell holding the young girl's arm.

I kept them within sight easily, as long as daylight lasted, but when that faded my work was more difficult. They went farther across the moors than I anticipated, but presently they turned, and came slowly back towards the house. I got behind a big rock, and so hid myself from them as they passed by me. When they had gone a few yards I determined to carry my plan into effect. As I said some time ago, my arrangements were very clumsy, and had not good fortune favoured me all might have been different. However, this was what I did. Walking along on the heather, I made no noise until I came close to them, then I strode boldly up and took hold of Joyce Patmore's hand.

"Good evening, Miss Langham," I said, just as young fellows do to young farmers' daughters with whom they are well acquainted. "I shall have the pleasure of seeing you to Treduda, shan't I? It's just in my way."

I slipped the note into Joyce's hand before they recovered from their surprise, and I am certain Mrs. Foxwell did not see my action.

"I strode boldly up and took hold of Joyce Patmore's hand."—Page 84.

"Excuse me," said Mrs. Foxwell, "you are mistaken. Neither of us bears the name of Miss Langham."

"Forgive me, ladies," I said, in a loud, boisterous way, "but it is rather dark, and I cannot see plainly. Hope no offence, I'm sure. I wouldn't offend for anything."

While I spoke I pressed Joyce Patmore's hand over the note I had placed within it. I felt her arm tremble as though she were afraid, but she gave no other sign of fear.

"There's no offence," said Mrs. Foxwell. Then, as if she desired to know who I was, she said, "Do you live near here?"

"A long way from here, ma'am. I hope I have not frightened you. I meant nothing but kindness in speaking, and I know that Miss Langham always comes this way when she goes visiting her aunt at Downderry. That's Downderry," I continued, pointing across the moors. "Don't you see that flickering light?"

Mrs. Foxwell looked in the direction towards which I pointed, and while she did so I pressed Joyce Patmore's arm as if to assure her that I was a friend.

"Good night, ladies. Hope you'll get safely to your journey's end. I wish I could help you," I added, meaningly, "but I must

hurry on, seeing you are not going my way."

I went on, whistling, and turned on a branch track which led to Treduda, where a Miss Langham really lived.

I had not gone more than a few yards before I was harassed with a hundred fears. Had I done right? Did Joyce Patmore understand? Would she give Mrs. Foxwell the letter? Did the woman see the note I had given to Joyce? Supposing Mrs. Foxwell had no suspicion, would the lonely girl trust me, an entire stranger? These and a hundred other questions troubled me. I saw now, when it was too late, that if Mrs. Foxwell were to see the letter, my chances of helping her would be gone. And yet what else could I do? However, I hoped for the best, and while a hundred other plans shaped themselves in my brain, and while I told myself again and again what I ought to have done, I had faith to believe that my efforts would not be futile.

Of my feelings towards Joyce as I held her arm I will not speak. Nothing but a keen sense of her danger kept me from saying and doing that which would be wild and foolish.

Not long later I had again hidden myself

behind the garden fence, and was watching the window of her room. If my note had done its work she would appear there alone, and would in some way tell me if she would accept my help.

Presently the light shone from the room, but the window-blind was drawn before Joyce appeared. Soon after I saw the shadows of two forms, but these moved rapidly past the window; after that I think the room was empty. A long time I waited, until I almost gave up hope. I was almost sure that Mrs. Foxwell had discovered my ruse, and that in the future Joyce would be more securely guarded, or perhaps spirited away to another hiding-place.

At length, however, I heard the sound of footsteps on the stairs. They were not loud, but I heard them plainly in the silence of the winter night. Then I heard the click of the farmyard gate, and saw Bill Best come up and open the cattle-house door.

"Is that you, Bill?" It was Peter Sleeman who spoke.

"Iss."

"Aw; I may sa well 'elp 'ee."

"All right."

Peter came into the yard, and I heard the indistinct mumbling of their voices as they

talked. A few minutes later their work was done.

"Nothin' else, I spoase?" said Bill.

"No, nothin'."

"Oal right. Good night."

"Good night."

Peter came back to the house again.

"Graacey, 'ave 'ee 'ad yer supper?" I heard him shout.

"Iss, Pitter cheeld."

"Then be off to bed."

I did not hear her reply, but a few seconds later I heard feeble footsteps tottering up the bare wooden stairs.

After that there was, perhaps, ten minutes of silence, and then I heard Peter's voice again.

"Mrs. Foxey, ther's a capital fire in the back kitchen. I've brought in the aisy chair, too."

My heart began to beat with more hope. At any rate, if Mrs. Foxwell had discovered anything, it did not appear that she had as yet communicated it to Peter.

A little later I heard footsteps on the stairs again, and then all was silent. I could hear the loud beating of my heart as I sat and listened; for I was very excited. The next few minutes would decide whether I

should be able to help the young girl who had become as dear to me as my own life.

Scarcely a breath of wind stirred. Now and then, it is true, I could hear a kind of low moaning out in the moors where the breezes swept across the open spaces, but here it was sheltered, and not a movement could be seen among the prickly foliage of the fir-trees. The house lay in silence; so silent was it that the cry of the moor-birds sounded quite plainly in my ears.

After waiting a few minutes longer, I saw the window-blind slowly begin to roll up. No noise was made, and the light in the room was so dim that I could not see who was the occupant, nevertheless I felt sure that Joyce Patmore waited to speak to me.

CHAPTER VII.

The Prisoner's Letter.

I did not hesitate a second. I crept over the fence as noiselessly as possible, and then went across the little garden-plot towards the window. I saw it slowly and noiselessly lifted.

"I am here," I said, as plainly as I could in a whisper.

"Who are you?"

"I gave you that note on the moors. Have you read it?"

"Yes."

"Has that Mrs. Foxwell seen it? Does she know that I gave it to you?"

"No."

"Will you let me help you? I will take you from here, if you will let me."

"Who are you? Oh, forgive me; but I feel I can trust no one. How did you find out I was here? Do you know why I am nere?"

"You may trust me—you may!" I

whispered, eagerly. "I—I would do anything to prove myself your friend. I found out that you were here by following the carriage across the moors on the night you came; but I do not know why you are here. But I will find out—if I can."

"I have been here, oh, such a long time—why, if you are my friend, did you not try and help me before?"

Her words wounded me like the stab of a poisoned knife. I had not tried to help her, because I had been with one who expected me to wed her.

"Forgive me," she went on, "but I have been nearly mad, and it is so terrible to be here."

"Hav'n't they been kind to you?"

"Yes, in a way; but I am imprisoned here without knowing why. I don't know where I am, I don't know why I am kept here. I am frightened at the loneliness; it is so terrible here. And everything is a mystery."

"You are in Cornwall," I said; "you are about a dozen miles from Bodmin, and a few miles from Router and Brown Willy."

"And you, oh, who are you?"

"I am a young farmer. My name is

Robert Tremain. I live at Rosecarrol, which is about three miles from here."

"Hush," she said, "don't speak so loud. Mrs. Foxwell watches me very closely. If she were to discover me here—oh, I daren't think of it."

I listened intently, and thought I heard the murmur of voices in the kitchen.

"It's all safe," I said. "Mrs. Foxwell is talking with Sleeman. Oh, I want to help you, if you will let me."

She was silent for a minute, while I looked eagerly towards her. I could not discern her features plainly, but I could see the dim outline of her form.

"I am afraid to dare anything," she said. "I have been so ill, and—oh, I am sure there is some one coming."

I listened again, but could hear nothing. "It's all safe," I said; "go on, tell me."

"Do you know Edgar Trelaske?" she asked, suspiciously.

"No. If it was he who brought you, I never saw him save on that night when he came here."

"Why should you want to help me?" she asked again. "What am I to you? There is no reason why you should wish to help me."

"That night when they brought you here, I followed," I replied. "I heard you scream in the carriage, and I felt sure there was foul play. I saw you as you were carried into the house, and I made up my mind that I would find out what it meant. But I could not. Last night, however, I came here, and saw you looking out of the window. Your face was very sad, and—and I felt I would do anything to help you. After that I crept by the kitchen window and listened while Sleeman and Mrs. Foxwell were talking."

"Did they say anything about me? Do they know why I am kept here?"

"No, I don't think they know who you are, although they were talking about you. Mrs. Foxwell said you would not confide in her in any way. It was Sleeman who suggested that Mrs. Foxwell should take you for a walk; that was how I came to you on the moors and gave you that note. Oh, I do want to help you."

"Oh, thank you; I believe you do!"

"I do, and if you will trust in me, I——"

"Oh, I will—but stop. She's coming, I'm sure! There, go away. Here's a note I've written in the hope that you might be a friend. Perhaps to-morrow night——" She

left the window before completing the sentence.

Eagerly picking up the note, I went quickly to the tree behind which I had hidden myself on the night that Joyce Patmore was brought to Dreardowns, and there waited and listened. I heard no sound, however. All was silent as the grave. Whatever Joyce Patmore had heard, I could hear nothing.

I did not go to the kitchen window to see if Sleeman and Mrs. Foxwell were together, I did not think it best; besides, I was anxious to get home, to be in the secrecy of my own bedroom, so that I might read what she had written.

Again I forgot Kezia Tamblin; again I forgot all difficulties, save the difficulty of setting at liberty the woman I loved. Again my heart throbbed with a great joy—she had spoken to me, and she trusted me! She would not have given me the letter but for that, and as I thought of this, I felt that my strength was as the strength of ten. I determined that no obstacle should keep me from fulfilling my purpose; I vowed a vow that it should be ill with the man who stood in my way. A hundred times on my way home did I put my hand in my pocket to

assure myself that her letter was safe, while each minute my eagerness increased to read what she had written.

"She expects me again," I cried; "her last words to me were, 'Perhaps, to-morrow night.' I will come, Joyce; don't fear, my love, I will come."

As soon as I arrived at the house, I went straight to my room, and having lit a candle, took her letter from my pocket and began to read. It lies before me as I write, Joyce's first letter to me, and I copy it here word for word. This is how it ran :—

"In the letter which you placed in my hand, when we were on the moors a little while ago, you told me that you were my friend, and that you wanted to help me. I am not sure that I can speak to you to-night as you suggested, so I am writing this in the hope that I may be able to give it you.

"My name is Joyce Patmore, and I was brought here a month ago, brought against my will, brought by force, and I am not sure of the reason why. I am quite ignorant of where I am, for I was unconscious during nearly the whole of the journey. I am treated kindly here—that is, as kindly as such a prisoner as I can be treated. The loneliness,

the sense of terror, and the mystery which surrounds me nearly drives me mad.

"I cannot tell you more here; but if you are my friend, as you say you are, I pray you, as I have prayed to God, to set me at liberty. I am friendless, I am penniless, so that I can do nothing; but if you will take me from here, if you will help me to get away from the power of the man who brought me here, I shall never cease to thank you, never cease to ask God to bless you.

"I can give you no positive clue as to why I am thus treated; but I cannot help thinking and believing that there must have been some terrible reason for taking such measures as those taken in bringing me here.

"Oh, if you are my friend, help me, and deliver me from this terrible place.

"J. P."

I read this letter over again and again, until I knew it by heart. The writing was clear and bold, although here and there it was blurred as if by tears. But it gave no further clue to her identity. She had told me nothing of her early life; she had not revealed her birthplace, nor the name of the home from which she had been taken. Evidently she did not trust me enough to tell

me, or perhaps she was afraid that by some means the letter might be miscarried.

That she was a lady I did not doubt. Everything told me that. Reared as I was on the wilds which surround Brown Willy and Router, I had been to school, and I had visited my Uncle Jack, at whose house I saw many of the most respectable families in the county. But more than all I had thought of my mother, and Joyce Patmore reminded me of her. Her words and manner, excited as she was, were those of a girl tenderly reared; her letter, written as it was under strange circumstances, was undoubtedly that of one who had been well educated. Anyhow, I loved her more and more as I read, and my determinations to set her at liberty and to find out the secret of her imprisonment became stronger.

By-and-by, however, the difficulties appeared greater. My relations towards Kezia Tamblin loomed up before me, while the difficulty of providing a safe asylum for Joyce Patmore, even although I might take her from Dreardowns, was very great.

I was very poor; everything reminded me of that; and I knew it would be impossible to take her to Rosecarrol. What, then, should I do if I set her at liberty? She had

no money, I had none. What could be done? Yet such is the divine madness of love that I laughed at difficulties, and was willing to trust to the uncertain future.

Still I must do something, and all that night, whether sleeping or waking, I was making plans in order to rescue Joyce Patmore.

The following morning I went to Penliggle, the place I mentioned at the beginning of this history as an off farm belonging to Rosecarrol. It is nearly as lonely as Dreardowns, and the house there at that time was not so good as the one at Dreardowns. I went there, however, because my nurse lived there. She had married one of my father's men, who had acted as a sort of manager on the farm, and had lived there ever since I first left home in order to go to school at Probus. If ever a servant loved a young master Sarah Truscott loved me. I remember very well how, when Nick Truscott, who had been courting her several years, wanted her to get married, she told him very plainly that she never would while Robert was at home and wanted her.

"B'leeve you love the young maaster mor'n you love me, Sarah," grumbled Nick.

"Never you mind," retorted Sarah; "this

I know, I sha'ant git spliced till Robert do go 'way to school, mind that now."

Neither would she; and, although she married him the day after I went to Probus, Nick stuck to it that I always stood first in her affections. She was about fifty at the time of which I write, and if report spoke truly, and I have a shrewd suspicion that it did, she kept her husband well in hand.

"Nobody do know what a boobah he'd make of hesself ef I ded'n taake un down a peg now and then," she would say, and perhaps she was not far wrong.

Sarah was a shrewd, keen-witted, sensible woman, while Nick was a good-tempered, thick-headed specimen of a country labourer. On ordinary occasions he was fairly discreet, for the simple reason that he daren't be otherwise, because he stood in healthy fear of his wife. The way to make Nick tell all he knew was to give him about two quarts of middling strong ale, and then he took the world into his confidence. Owing to the fact that Sarah kept the purse, this happened but seldom; but it had happened on two or three occasions, after which for some two or three months Nick was never seen in society.

I concluded that, on the whole, if any one

was able to help me it would be Sarah. She had no children, and having, as people said, "noashuns 'bove 'er staashun," she kept a spare bedroom. I was sure, moreover, that she knew how to hold her tongue, and, above all, she loved me.

Accordingly I went to her, and found her busily engaged in dressmaking, for Sarah added to Nick's wages by making the attire of several of the servant maidens in the district, as well as that of a few of the farmers' daughters.

"I was wonderin' when you was a comin', my deear," was Sarah's greeting; "but I spoase you've bin too bissy a coartin' to care 'bout me. But there, I *be* glad to zee 'ee, my deear."

"I haven't forgotten you, Sarah," I said, "even if I haven't been."

"Of course you aant, my deear; but to tell 'ee the truth, I thought you'd a towld me, and, I must zay, I baint plaised. She edn good 'nough for you, Robert. You ded'n ought to 'ave she."

"Sarah," I said, "you don't know all."

"I knawd ther' was summin' in the wind."

"What, Sarah?"

"Well, I knaw that Kiah Tamblin zaid

two months afore that he knawd who was boss ov Rosecarrol. Be I right? Es that the mainin' ev et, Robert, my deear?"

"I'm afraid it is, Sarah. I know I can trust you. You love our family, and you love mother as much as I do. It seems the only way to keep Rosecarrol in the family."

"Es et for sure now? Well, I be fine and sorry. I've saved up a few pounds, Robert, ef they be——"

"No, Sarah, 'tis no use. Ten times your savings would be of no use, and yet if it hadn't been for mother, I'd give it all up rather than marry her."

"Would 'ee now? I do 'ear as 'ow she's fairly maazed 'bout 'ee."

"I'm afraid she is."

"'Fraid?"

"Yes, afraid—Sarah, there's something else. I can tell you, I know,—tell you anything, and know it will never go any further. I know you love me, Sarah."

Any one looking at her for the first time would never accuse her of being sentimental or even affectionate, but she got up from her chair, came to me and put her arms around my neck, and gave me a hug while tears trickled down her cheek.

"What es et, Robert, my dear? Ef ould

Sarah can do anything, ounly zay et and she'll do it."

So I told Sarah what I have written in these pages, while she constantly interrupted me by ejaculations and questions. When I had finished she said:

"Iss, Robert, my dear, she's the wawn; she shud be missus of Rosecarrol."

"But how can it be, Sarah? Kezia is jealous, while old Tamblin is just longing to see his daughter the wife of a Tremain."

"We must zee 'bout that, my dear, we must zee; but fust of all, Robert, you must take away poor Miss Joyce from there."

"But where can I take her, Sarah?"

"Taake 'er? Why, taake 'er 'ere, to be sure. I'll never laive nobody knaw. Nobody do come 'ere, my dear; and she can 'ave the little parlour, and the room ovver; then you can come and zee 'er, caan't 'ee now, Robert, my dear?"

"And Nick?"

"Nick!" she said, with proper scorn; "Nick do knaw his plaace, my deear—you jist be aisy 'bout Nick."

I left Sarah soon after, and as she had promised to be ready night or day, I had no fear about a temporary hiding-place for Joyce. So much scheming, however, had

made me wise, and although I hated the idea, I made up my mind to go and see Kezia that evening before paying another visit to Dreardowns.

Kezia greeted me very coolly, when, about six o'clock, I arrived at "The Queen's Head."

"Why didn' 'ee come last night?" she asked.

I parried the question as well as I could, which led to her putting other queries. As a consequence, my visit that evening was by no means a pleasant one, and when I left about eight o'clock, although there was no open breach between us, we were more cool towards each other than we had ever been before.

I had not been away from the house two minutes, however, before I had ceased to think of Kezia's anger, for the picture of Joyce Patmore was before me, and the last words she had spoken to me were ringing in my ears as I hurried towards Dreardowns.

CHAPTER VIII.

How Joyce Patmore and Robert Tremain went from Dreardowns to Penliggle.

I had scarcely reached the garden fence, when my heart gave a great bound. I saw Joyce Patmore's face plainly in the lamplight, saw her as she looked wistfully out into the darkness. But she was not so sad as when I had first seen her, the light of hope was in her eyes, her face was not drawn with pain.

The window was, I saw, slightly open, just enough to ventilate the room, and I remember wondering at the time whether means had been used to keep it from opening wider.

I made a slight noise, and then I saw to my great joy that she gladly welcomed my coming.

"I am come to take you away," I said.

"When?" she asked, eagerly.

"To-night, if you will come with me," I replied. "I have arranged with my old nurse, who is as trusty as the sun, to give

you a hiding-place until further arrangements can be made."

"But how can I get away?" she asked. "This window has iron bars across it, the door of the room is locked, and even if it were not the only way out of the house is by the stairway which leads into the kitchen where Mrs. Foxwell and the farmer are sitting."

"I'll gag them both," I said, readily, "and bind them hand and foot. They will lie all night, and not be set free till the morning. By that time you will be safe."

"Oh, don't use any violence, if you can help," she whispered, anxiously. "I could not bear it. Can't you use any other means?"

I was rather glad she did not approve of this method, as I did not wish for Sleeman or the woman to see me. If they did, they would know something of Joyce's whereabouts. Besides, I did not wish to use violence.

"Then I'll fetch a ladder," I said. "I'll climb up and pull away those bars; then I will lift you out of the window, and bring you down here."

"Can you?" she asked, eagerly. "I have tried to move them, but I cannot."

"But I can," I said. "The wall is rotten,

and there's not a man in the parish as strong as I. That was proved at the last wrestling." I said this a little proudly, partly because I wanted her to think well of me, and partly because I wanted her to have faith in me.

"But you will make noise; you will arouse their suspicions."

"I will see," I said. "Old Graacey Grig is in bed, isn't she?"

"Yes; she came upstairs half-an-hour ago."

"Very well; be brave, Miss Joyce, make all the preparations you can, and then wait. Never fear; nothing shall harm you, and if God gives me strength I will set you free."

"Oh, thank you; you are kind. Be careful for yourself, won't you? That Sleeman is a terrible-looking man; besides, there's a dog."

I laughed quietly, because my heart was glad. She was interested in my welfare; she did not wish harm to happen to me. Still her words made me anxious. I remembered Sleeman had a dog. It had been a mystery to me how I had failed to escape him on my previous visits. Possibly, however, it was because I had not gone near the strawhouse in the barnyard where the dog usually lay; anyhow, I had to reckon with

the brute that night, for, in order to get a ladder, it was necessary for me to go into the yard. Not that I minded him so much—that is, for all the harm he might do me; I was rather afraid lest he should start barking and thus put Sleeman on the watch.

I therefore crept quietly into the yard, and noted with an amount of satisfaction that the wind would carry any sounds which might be made in the "mowey" away from the house. Besides, I hoped that Peter would be sufficiently amorous that night to forget all else.

I had scarcely passed the first corn mow (stack) when the dog saw me. He started up with a low growl, and began creeping towards me with his head close against the ground.

"All right, Shep," I said; "all right old boy. Good old dog, then."

But Shep knew that I did not belong to Dreardowns, and his growl became louder, while his eyes burnt red. I am sorry now for what followed, because I am fond of dogs, and can't bear unkindness to any dumb animal. But I could not help it; Joyce Patmore's liberty was more to me than all the dogs that ever barked. I had to make short work of Shep, therefore, and a

minute later his power of barking was gone for ever. Knowing where a farmer always keeps his ladders, I made for the spot and seized the one that seemed about the right length—that is, a fifteen staved one—and then made my way back to the garden again.

By this time I began to feel excited. A sort of fever came over me, and had Peter Sleeman or any other man tried to stop me I should have made short work of him. I placed the ladder against the wall, and climbed up. By this time the wind blew loudly, and thus drowned any sounds I might make; my fear now was that Mrs. Foxwell might come back to the room before I could get Joyce away.

I found her waiting by the window. "Is all well?" she asked, eagerly.

"All well," I replied; "don't be afraid."

I seized one of the bars. It held firmly. Evidently the wall was firmer than I thought. Not that I had any fear that I was not strong enough to pull them away; I feared rather that the ladder would break when I put forth my strength. It did not, however, and in a few minutes the two lower bars lay in the garden.

"Now, Miss Joyce," I said, "can you creep through here?"

"Carefully I carried her down."—Page 109.

Without hesitating she came. Placing one hand in mine, which act sent a joyful thrill through my whole body, she crept out, for the bottom frame of the window was lifted as high as it could be. The window-ledge on which she stood was a good many feet from the ground, and I was wondering whether she would be hurt if she fell, because I feared about the strength of the ladder.

"Look," I said; "do you think if I went down that you could get on the ladder by yourself? I don't know whether it is strong enough to bear us both."

"I am afraid by myself," she replied; "if you let me go I should fall. The wind blows so terribly."

I was almost glad she said this, because to hold her hand was joy beyond words to me.

"Very well, then," I said; "perhaps it will bear us. There, lean as much towards me as you can."

She trusted me implicitly, and a minute later all her weight rested on my left hand. To me she seemed as light as a feather, although I felt the ladder bend terribly. Never shall I forget the joy I realised as I felt my arm around her. I seemed to have the strength of ten. Carefully I carried her

down, and a few seconds later I placed her on the ground.

"You are not afraid?" I whispered.

"Not with you," she replied; "but let us get away quickly."

"I will carry the ladder back where I found it, and then, perhaps, they will think you have got away by yourself. We are close to the barn-yard."

"But the dog is there," she whispered. "I have often heard him barking."

"The dog won't hurt you," I said. "Come."

I held her with one hand, while with the other I carried the ladder. We reached the yard in safety, and I had scarcely deposited the ladder when she gave a slight scream, and pointed at poor Shep's body.

"Look!" she said.

This put another thought in my mind. "He's dead," I said. "I must take him where he will tell no tales, at least for a time."

She shuddered as I took him by the leg, and dragged him behind me until we reached a big pool. I had some stout cord in my pocket, and with this I fastened the poor animal to a heavy stone, and then threw them both into the pool. The sound of the

splash had barely died away when I knew that her escape had been discovered. Above the roaring of the wind I heard Peter shouting, while a woman's cry reached our ears.

"Let us be away quickly," I said; "in a few minutes we shall be beyond their reach." I hurried her along until she was out of breath and then stopped.

"Shep! Shep!" I heard Peter call. "where can the dog be?" He had followed us for some distance, while the wind blew the sound towards us.

Above us was the open moor, and there was sufficient light to discern us, if we ventured at that moment. So I crept to one of the many big rocks, and we hid ourselves behind it.

"You'd better come back, you maid," Peter shouted; "you caant git away, so you'd better come back paiceable now. It'll be wuss for 'ee ef you doan't now."

Joyce Patmore nestled close to me. "You won't let him take me, will you?" she said.

I put my arm around her, and she did not resent my action. "I'd die first!" I said, fiercely.

She gave a sigh of relief, and my heart seemed too big for my bosom. It was joy

beyond words to feel that she depended on me, and trusted in me.

"We'll wait here for a little while, if you are not afraid," I continued. "You are not afraid, are you?"

"Not with you," she said.

"Then," I said, joyfully, "I will take you to Sarah Truscott, my old nurse, and she'll give you a home till you care to make other arrangements."

"I will tell you everything that I can," she said, "then, perhaps, you will be able to help me to find out why I was taken here." She seemed to know what was passing through my mind.

"Yes," I said, and then we were quiet for a few seconds.

"It is so good of you to take such trouble," she said, impulsively, after the silence. "I—I'm a stranger to you, and yet you are so kind. But I sha'n't trouble you long. To-morrow I can go home—if—if—" but she did not finish the sentence.

I did not answer her, because my heart was so sore at the thought of her leaving.

"I think I should have gone mad if you did not give me hope; I had begun to despair," she went on. "I pleaded, oh! how I pleaded with that woman to let me go

but she would not. She became angry with me, too," and she shuddered as if in fear. "I was afraid of that terrible man, too," she whispered; "he looks so dreadful; and then I was in constant dread about the future. I did not know when those—those who brought me here would come, and I was not sure what they had in their minds. Oh, it was terrible! Thank you so much for helping me."

"It has been a joy to help you," I said. "Look! they have a lantern now; there it is, among the fir-trees. Ah! they are going to search the other way; we shall soon be able to go now."

She gave a shudder.

"Are you afraid?" I asked.

"It is so terrible on these moors—so very terrible. Listen how the wind moans; and the rain is beginning to fall."

"And you are thinly clothed, too."

"Yes, all my clothes were in the bedroom, but I could not get there; my boots are very thin, too."

"Never mind," I said. "Sarah Truscott will help you. She's a poor woman, but I think she'll have all you need."

"I have no money," she said; "it was all taken from me; but I have two good rings

here—they should be worth sufficient to pay for all I want till I get back home."

"You must not think of travelling to-morrow; you'll want a few days' rest after all this excitement. There, we can go now. Will you hold fast to my arm?"

I seemed to live a lifetime as I walked across the moors that night with Joyce Patmore resting on my arm. Never before did I realise such joy, such fear, and such anxiety; never before did I hope so much from the future, never before did I dread it so. Never was the sky of my life so bright, and never had it been so dark. For when the joy at feeling Joyce by my side almost made me shout in my gladness, I remembered Kezia Tamblin, I thought of the debt on Rosecarrol, I remembered that this young girl, for whom I would die to serve, would leave me soon.

Still it was heaven to feel her near, to hear her voice. As the distance between us and Dreardowns increased she became more hopeful, more confident, her dread because of the loneliness grew less.

Perhaps this was because I told her of myself, of my boyhood, my schooldays, my life on the farm, and of my mother. As we drew near Penliggle she made me repeat the

story of how I came to know about her, and asked me many questions about what I had seen and heard. Then she asked me about Sarah Truscott, and what she had said, and then I had difficulty to keep from telling her of my love—ay, I wanted to tell her all my story as I have told it here, that she might understand why I had dared to try and rescue her.

Perhaps it was the light from Penliggle that kept me from doing this; indeed, I think it was this that kept her from telling me her story then, instead of afterwards.

We found Sarah in a great state of excitement. She had been expecting us for hours. My story had aroused all the romance in the dear old soul's nature, and she thought when we came that she might welcome Joyce as the new mistress of Rosecarrol without further delay.

"Bless yer 'art, my deear Miss Joyce, 'ow you be tremblin'. Come upstairs to waunce, my deear, and taake off they wet dabs. I've jist made a new frock for Miss Coad ovver to Bolventor, and it'll suit 'ee to a T, my deear. Doan't 'ee be 'fraid. Nick es gone to bed, and es snoiin' like a pig. I've fried som' 'am rasher and eggs for 'ee boath. Wait down here by the vire, Robert; then taake off that

jacket; I'll bring down Nick's Sunday wawn for 'ee. It'il be rather tight, but it must do for t'night."

And so the good old soul talked on, while a great peace came into my heart. It seemed like a great calm after the storm.

A few minutes later Joyce Patmore came into the little parlour, and for the first time I saw her as she really was. I will not try and describe her as she appeared to me that night; I could not if I tried. Even now my heart feels strange as I think of that moment. As her great dark eyes met mine, and flashed a look of thankfuluess and hope, I knew that in all my life I had never seen any one so beautiful and so pure. The reader may smile at this, and say I was only a country lad of twenty-one, and that in my state of mind I was not fit to judge. This may be so; but since those days, I have seen the beauties of Plymouth, of Exeter, and London, but never have I seen any one like her.

And yet I felt uncomfortable, for I knew that her eyes were upon me. She seemed to want to look into the depths of my soul, and read my life. It was then that I felt how much she had trusted me, and how much that night's step might mean to her. I was

afraid, too, that she would regard me as rough and uncouth. Who was I, that a maiden tenderly reared (as I was sure she was) should care about me?

"You are safe now," I said; "you needn't fear anything. Sarah is as faithful as harvest time, and I assure you that I—I would do anything to serve you."

Then her face blushed a rosy red, just like a June rose, and her eyes became dim with tears. I saw her lips tremble, too, as though her heart was touched, and this set my heart beating more wildly than ever.

What did she think of me? I wondered. Did I repel her, or did she think kindly of me? I believe I should have asked her, but Sarah came into the room, with a steaming plate of ham and eggs.

"Ther now, my dears, you must be wisht and could, and 'ungry as adgers. Now, ait some supper."

Neither of us satisfied Sarah, however—we were too excited to eat; besides, Joyce was eager to tell her story, and I was eager to know it.

Penliggle had once been a farm by itself, and the house was far more comfortable than an ordinary labourer's cottage. Moreover, the room in which we sat had shutters to the

window. These I closed, and then pulling the most comfortable chair that Sarah possessed close to the fire, I led Joyce to it, and then, Sarah having finished her duties, we sat down and listened to the young girl's story.

CHAPTER IX.

The Story which Joyce Patmore Told.

"I had better tell you all about myself," she began, "then you will be able to judge better why I am here. My home is in Devonshire, on the north coast, not far from Ilfracombe. My mother died when I was a child, and my father, who was almost heart-broken at her death, went to Australia. He cared very little about me, I think, for he has written only about once a year, and never speaks of coming home. It is more than a year now since I heard from him. I have always lived with my uncle, my father's elder brother. Uncle is rich, and my father is, I believe, poor. You see, uncle being the elder brother the estate fell to him; and so, when my mother died, my father said he had nothing to keep him in England. I have lived very happily at Grassdale, for both my uncle and my cousins have been very kind to me."

"Cousins?" I said; "what are they like?"

"Well, George, the elder, I have not seen for two years. He quarrelled with my uncle, and left home. He declared that he would never come back to Grassdale any more, while my uncle declared that he would set the dogs upon him if he ever came within Grassmere gates. You see, George was very headstrong and easily roused, while my uncle is a man who cannot bear to be thwarted. My other cousin, Arthur, is very handsome and very clever."

"Will you tell me about this Arthur?" I said, for already I began to feel jealous of him.

"There is little to tell," she replied. "George being the eldest son, and the one who would inherit the estate, Arthur has been trained for the Bar. He has never liked it, however, and as he is anxious to get married at once, he blames his father for adopting a profession which, he says, will not bring him an income for years."

"Who does he wish to marry?" I asked.

"Miss Helen Trelaske. Bodinnick lands join ours, and we have been friendly with the Trelaskes for years."

"Yes," I said, eagerly; "go on!"

"Some time ago news came to Grassmere that George was dead. The letter which contained the information was written in America, and said that he had died of swamp fever. This made my uncle repent of the quarrel he had with George, and altogether altered his feelings towards him. He has never been the same man since. He thinks he has treated George unfairly, and I am sure he would sacrifice anything if he could only recall the angry words he spoke to him.

"Then a few days before I was taken here my uncle had a fall from his horse, and was brought home unconscious. He was a heavy man, and the doctor despaired of his recovery. For hours he lay unconscious, and when I last spoke to Dr. Gray about him he said he did not think Uncle George could live more than a few days at the outside; not that the fall was so bad, but he, the doctor, believed that something was weighing on his mind, and that he did not want to live."

"Yes," I said; "and did anything particular happen, Miss Joyce, before you were taken away?"

"Yes. It was this way. The day when —when——" she shuddered as if in fear.

"Yes, I understand," I said.

"Well, that day, when the postman came, I noticed two letters with an Australian post-mark. One I saw was addressed to me, and I felt sure it was in George's hand-writing. I opened it eagerly, and found that I was right. He told me that he bitterly repented of his behaviour to his father, and that he was writing him, begging him for his forgiveness, and that he hoped to return in a few weeks, when he would bring me a glad surprise. I had just time to note that the other letter from Australia was addressed to Uncle George and in my cousin's handwriting, when Arthur came into the room. 'Look, Arthur,' I cried, 'George is not dead, after all; I've got a letter from him. He'll be home in a few weeks. Here's one for uncle, too. Won't he be glad? I'm going to take it to him. Isn't it glorious?"

"'Stop!' said Arthur. 'I'll take my brother's letter to father—that is, if it is my brother's letter?

"Just then a servant came, telling me that a new housemaid whom I thought of engaging was waiting to see me in the housekeeper's room, and also that a gentleman wished to see Arthur.

"I went to her, leaving my cousin to receive his visitor. I stayed with her perhaps

a quarter of an hour, and then was just going upstairs to see my uncle when Arthur stopped me.

"'Father is asleep,' he said, 'and you know the doctor tells us it is very dangerous to waken him. I've got the letter here, and I shall take it up again in a few minutes. I say, Joyce, tell us what George has written you.' He seemed very excited, and, naturally, I was excited beyond measure.

"So I told him, and we talked about the letter which told us he was dead, and wondered who wrote it. We had been talking about a quarter of an hour, perhaps more, when a servant came in, greatly excited.

"'Miss Joyce,' she cried, 'I've just seen old Tommy Williams. He says that poor Molly is taken suddenly ill, and he's afraid she'll not get over it. He was coming here to tell you that she wants to see you before she dies, and begs that you will come. She's all alone, for he had no one to send, and now he's gone for the doctor.'

"'Poor old Molly,' I cried, 'I'll go at once.' Molly was once a servant at Grassdale, and I had known her from childhood. 'Arthur,' I said, 'will you tell Beel to put a horse into the trap and drive me over? Poor old soul, she's been ailing a long time.'

"'Beel is away,' said Arthur, strangely moved, I thought, 'and you could get there by the time a horse is harnessed. Besides, you *must* walk through the fields.'

"Being anxious to get to Molly, I did not stay to argue, but hurried off at once. I saw no one on the carriage drive, neither did I meet any one in the lane outside the gates. I hurried through the fields, thinking, as I did so, that Arthur was right about the trap, because the cart track to Molly's cottage was a long way around.

"Not a soul was to be seen around the house; but that was not strange, and so, remembering that the poor old soul was all alone, I opened the cottage door and entered. No one was in the kitchen, but I heard Molly coughing in the room overhead. I was about to go up the narrow stairway, when I heard a step behind me. Before I could turn around to see who it was, I felt something pressed before my mouth, and I remember a strange smell. I tried to struggle, but I was powerless. I tried to scream, but could not; then I became unconscious."

"And after that?" I said.

"I remember nothing distinctly, until I found myself at the place you call Dreardowns. I recall what seems like a strange

dream of riding in the dark, and I have a faint remembrance of strange rooms and strange faces, but nothing definite."

"And that is all?"

"That is all."

"And have you any idea—that is, can you guess who put the handkerchief before your mouth in Molly's cottage?"

"I've thought of many, but I am afraid to—to——"

"It could not have been your cousin Arthur?"

"No, I left him in the library, and I went very fast to the cottage."

"Have you an enemy?"

"Not one in the world that I know of."

"Good Loard!" exclaimed Sarah, "I wonder et ded'n drive 'ee maazed, my deaar."

"I think I was almost mad for days after I was brought to Dreardowns. The place was so terribly lonely, and that Sleeman is such an awful man. I was ill, too, and for many days I thought I was going to die."

"I know who brought you," I said.

"Yes?" she said absently.

"Edgar Trelaske came with you."

"But what could be his motive for doing so?"

"I think I see that, too. Will you tell me all you know about him?"

"As I said, his estate joins my uncle's. He has always been very friendly with Arthur, and the two have been in London together. Then, you know, Arthur is engaged to Helen Trelaske. She lives with Edgar at Bodinnick."

"Is Trelaske wealthy?" I asked.

"The old Colonel left him a good deal, but there have been reports about his squandering it. George never like him!"

"And you say that this Trelaske and your cousin are very friendly?"

"Very. There was scarcely a day passed without their meeting."

"It's all plain," I said; "as plain as a pikestaff."

"But how?"

"Can't you see it?"

"I'm afraid to think of what seems the only solution. I have driven it from my mind again and again—it seems too mean, too base. They are both gentlemen."

"Ah!" I said, catching my breath, "you are led to the same conclusion as I."

"What es et?" asked Sarah, excitedly; "'tes oal a riddle to me."

"If George were dead, of course Arthur

would come in to all your uncle's wealth?" I queried.

"Yes, uncle willed nearly everything to him."

"But if George came back and became reconciled to your uncle, then he would take the greater part of it."

"He's the eldest son, and naturally Grassdale, with all the farms belonging to it, would fall to him."

"Just so, and then Arthur would not be in a position to marry Miss Trelaske, neither would he be able to get out of the money difficulties into which he and Trelaske have probably got. Have you any idea who your cousin's visitor was when you were called away to engage the new housemaid? Might it not be Trelaske?"

"Very probably; as I said, they met every day."

"Is Trelaske clever?"

"Very."

"And would know the use of such a thing as chloroform, as well as be able to get it?"

"Oh, yes; but he has known me from a child and——"

"Has been in love with you?" I asked.

"No; he has been paying attentions to Miss Henley, of Tor Park."

"That's all right," I said, with a sigh of relief, for I feared otherwise. "I think the way is very plain, Miss Joyce." Then I repeated the conversation I had heard between Peter Sleeman and Mrs. Foxwell.

"Then what do you think they intended doing with me?" she asked.

"They intended waiting in the hope that your uncle would die before your cousin could return, and then, when their position was assured, they would spirit you back in the same mysterious way that you were brought here. I should not be at all surprised to hear that your cousin was pretending to use every means in his power to find you, so as to deceive the people in the neighbourhood.

"Then what would you suggest now?" she said, anxiously.

"It seems to me," I replied, "that what is done should be done quickly. As no steps have been taken to set you at liberty, I should imagine that your uncle is still living. Of course, it may be too late," and I reproached myself for the way I had spent that month when I thought of no one but Kezia Tamblin.

"Anyhow," I went on, "I think the right step will be for me to take you home

to-morrow. I can drive you to Launceston in the morning, and from there we can take ticket to the station nearest your home." I said this with a sad heart, for the thought of leaving her pained me beyond words.

"I should be afraid to be left there now," she said, with a shudder. "If what you think is true, Arthur and Trelaske would stop at nothing."

"I don't think they would dare to take any further steps," I said. "I should take you to the house boldly, and if your uncle were alive you would see him and tell him. Then the servants would protect you.'

"I will go if you wish," she replied, "but I am afraid."

"There is another course," I said. "I could go alone, and find out how matters stood. I could go to-morrow morning, and perhaps be back again by night. You will be quite safe here," I said, looking at Sarah, who had been eagerly drinking in every word.

"Saafe!" cried Sarah; "I'd like to zee anybody hurt 'ee 'ere, my dear. Besides, nobody'll think you're 'ere. Why, Nick shaa'n't knaw you're in the 'ouse, ther now, and he'll never think ov axin'."

In this, however, Sarah was mistaken, as after-events proved.

"I will do what you think best, Mr. Tremain," Joyce said, looking at me in such a way that my heart seemed to leap to my throat in very joy.

"And you can feel comfortable here?" I asked; "you can feel quite safe with Sarah?"

"Perfectly comfortable; my only fear is that Sleeman may find out that I am here. He will naturally let Edgar Trelaske know I escaped from his house, and then—oh, you'll protect me, won't you?"

"Doan't you be 'fraid, Miss Joyce. Nothin' shall harm you—nothin'. Maaster Robert here is as strong as a hoss, and I—well, never mind," and Sarah looked as though she could conquer an army.

How long we talked I do not know, but when I left I promised to call early in the morning, and see what she had decided to do, while I should hold myself in readiness to serve her in any way I was able.

I seemed to walk on enchanted ground as I went back to Rosecarrol that night. I had held in my arms the young girl I loved. I had rescued her from her prison. I had seen the look of gratitude in her eyes. I would not think of Kezia Tamblin nor of my

father's debts. I lived in hope, and in the light of my love for Joyce.

It was very late when I arrived at Rosecarrol, but my mother was not yet asleep.

"Come and bid me good night, Robert," she said.

I went in and kissed her.

"Is all well with you, my boy?" she asked.

"Why, mother?"

"My boy, I know more about things than you imagine. I know more of your father's difficulties than you think."

I was silent.

"Do you love this girl Tamblin, Robert?"

"Why, mother?"

"You have seemed so strange these last two or three days when you have come to see me. Robert, my boy, if you don't love her——" She hesitated.

"What, mother?"

"Better be poor than to marry without love. I would rather, terrible as it would be, be turned out of Rosecarrol than to see you marry any one you did not want. Is it for me, Robert?"

"I'll tell you all in good time, mother," I said, "and be sure I shall love you whatever I do. Good-night, mother dear."

"Can't you trust your mother now,

Robert?" she said. "I know that we are in danger of being turned out of Rosecarrol; can't you tell me anything else?"

"Where's father?" I asked.

"He's asleep in the next room."

I drew a chair to her side, and told her everything.

"Now, mother, you know all, mother," I said, when we had finished, "what would you advise me to do?"

She waited a few seconds before replying, then she said, "I can trust you, Robert. Do what you think is right."

The next morning I rode to Penliggle while it was yet dark. Nick had left the house for Rosecarrol. He had some cattle to take to the butcher that day, and so had left early. I found Sarah eagerly awaiting me.

"She caan't go weth 'ee, Robert, my dear," she said.

"Why?"

"She've took a bad cowld, my dear, and edn't fit to travel. Don't bother, Robert, I'll nuss 'er so that she'll be all right to-morrow. Here's a letter she've write for 'ee, Robert, my dear, and 'ere's another for her uncle."

I took them both, and then eagerly read mine. In addition to the name of the

station nearest Grassmere, and directions as to how I might get there, it contained further expressions of her thankfulness to me.

"If she only knew the joy she is giving me," I said to myself as I rode toward Launceston.

CHAPTER X.

The Journey from Cornwall to Devonshire and Back.

I had no definite knowledge as to when a train would start from Launceston for the station which Joyce had mentioned in her letter, but I had an idea there was one something before eight in the morning. It was half-past six when I left Penliggle, and I calculated that my horse would take me to Launceston in an hour. It was twelve miles, but I felt sure that Starlight could do it. It was a stiff ride, however; the roads were very heavy, and it was dark the greater part of the way. It was twenty minutes past seven when, in the first grey of the morning, I saw Launceston Castle, and as I got nearer to the town, the people who were astir looked curiously at me as Starlight, covered with sweat, dashed along the streets. Launceston Station, as everybody who has been there knows, is in a valley half-a-mile from the town, with St. Stephen's on the one side and

Launceston on the other, but I got there as the clock pointed to half-past seven. I quickly found a public-house, and telling the ostler to feed the horse with the best and groom him well, I rushed to the station, and found that the train was just going out.

"I want to get to Ilfracombe," I said to the booking-clerk.

"Jist in time," he replied. "Go straight to Tavistock and change. Then git in the train for Yeoford, and change again. The train'll be waitin' an you'll git to Ilfracombe by 'bout twelve o'clock."

"Can I get back to-night?" I asked.

'B'leeve you can," he replied, "but ax at Ilfracombe, there ed'n time for me to vind out now."

The train was five minutes late in starting, so I had time to look around, and about a minute before we left I saw Peter Sleeman ride in.

"Ah," thought I, "is he getting in this train?" But I soon saw that this was not his intention.

I called a porter to me. "See that man?" I said, pointing to Sleeman.

"Wot, that ugly beggar?"

"Yes. Well, I want you to watch him, and see what he does. Look out and see if

he meets any one here by train, and if he does, try and hear what they say to each other."

"What for?" grinned the porter, stupidly.

"Never mind. Don't say a word about what I've said to you, and if you tell me all about what he does, I'll give you half-a-crown when I come back. I expect to be here by the last train."

"Oal right, sur."

The train left the station, and I was left to my thoughts. I will not describe my journey; enough for me to say that I got to the station Joyce had mentioned about twelve o'clock."

"What is the last train by which I can get to Launceston to-night?" I asked the station-master.

"Twenty-six minutes past three," he said, after looking at the time-table a long while.

"And what time shall I get to Launceston?"

"'Bout half-past eight."

"I can do it, then," I thought, joyfully. At the same time I could hardly realise why I was there, neither could I understand the strange mission which I had undertaken.

And yet I felt that what I was doing was for the best. All that interested Joyce in-

terested me; moreover, I felt that she could not return home until I had made it safe for her.

I went to an hotel, and although I could ill afford it, I hired a horse. I remembered how little time I had, however, and so made myself five shillings the poorer. I easily found my way to Grassdale. The house was well known and the road was good. Close to the gateway leading to the house was a small cottage, and I thought a few judicious questions might do good.

"This place belongs to Squire Patmore?" I asked.

"It doth, but you caan't zee un, he's fine and poorly."

"Perhaps the young masters are at home," I ventured.

"No. Maaster George es dead, and Maaster Arthur got called away to-day. He went away in the middle ov the vore-noon weth Maaster Trelaske."

"Ah," I thought, "I'm not too late, then."

"Well, I'll ride up to the house. I daresay I can leave a message with the Squire."

"Iss, I expect you can."

Anxious as I was, I could not help admiring the rich loamy land, which stretched miles away on every hand. It was such a contrast

to the Altarnun Moors. There Nature was scanty, scrimping in her gifts. Here she was bounteous, generous. Huge oaks grew everywhere, while the woods were not comprised of stubbly growth, but of great forest trees.

The servant who answered my ring eyed me suspiciously, and seemed to wish to know much about me before admitting me into the house. I managed to pass the ordeal, however, and soon stood within the room which Joyce had described to me.

"Can I see Squire Patmore?" I asked.

"No; he sees no visitors, he is too ill."

"Is he too ill to receive a message?"

"No; he has been stronger these last few days. I will take any message you please.

"Can I have a pen and paper?"

She laid them before me, and left the room.

I hastily scribbed a few lines as follows:—

"I wish to see you very much. I know where the one you have lost is staying. I have come from her, and have a letter from her in my possession. This is very urgent. I am a farmer's son. My father farms one thousand acres of his own land. My name is Robert Tremain."

Then I wrote as a postscript, "Your son George is not dead; I know something about him."

This I placed in an envelope, and then hesitated. Was the servant trustworthy? Would she be primed by Arthur? I rang the bell, and she came in.

"I heard that there was a young lady living here," I said to her, "Miss Joyce Patmore. Can I see her?"

Instantly tears started to the girl's eyes. "No, sir; you can't see her," she said, with a sob.

"Is she ill?" I asked.

"No, sir; she's gone. I do not know where. No one knows; we've searched night and day."

I saw I could trust her. "Give this to your master, immediately," I said. "Place it in no hands but his, and wait for his answer."

She looked eagerly at me. "Very well, sir," she said, and left the room.

In three minutes she came rushing into the room, breathless. "Please, sir, Mr. Patmore will see you immediately." A minute later I was in the Squire's bedroom.

I could see that he was greatly excited when I entered. His hand trembled, and the

perspiration stood on his forehead. He eyed me keenly, as though he would look into my very soul.

"You tell me strange things in this note," he said. "How do I know you are speaking the truth?"

I looked around the room. A nurse was there, listening eagerly.

"I want to be alone with this gentleman. I'll excuse you."

"But, sir——" she began.

"I wish to be alone—that is sufficient," he repeated. The nurse left the room.

"This letter which your niece gave me may tell you if I am to be trusted," I said.

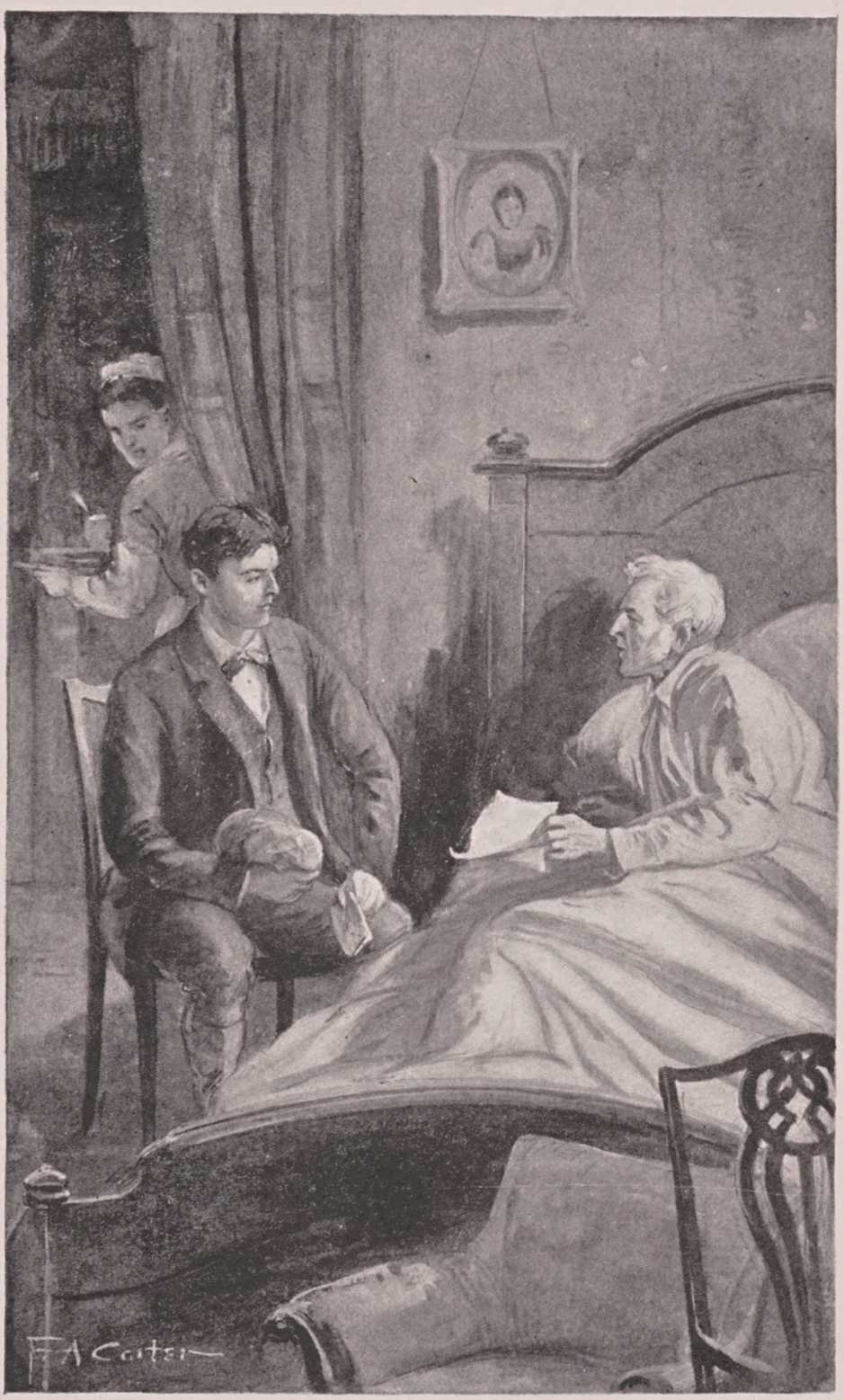
He read it partly through, and then closed his eyes. "I am so weak. Can you lift me up in bed and prop me with pillows?"

I did as he asked me, and then he read the letter through.

"Thank God," he said, when he had finished; then he added, "and thank you, young man."

"My niece tells me that you will tell me everything," he continued after a few seconds; "will you kindly do so?"

I told him what I have written in these pages—that is, I told him in bare outline, not hinting at my love for Joyce. God



"He eyed me keenly, as though he would look into my very soul"—Page 140.

knows I wanted to badly, but I dared not then.

"You have given me new life," he said, when I had finished my story; "new life. I shall get well, now. George alive—my eldest boy! Why, he may be here any day; but oh, Arthur, I did not think this of you!"

I thought I heard a rustling near the door, and I remembered the look on the nurse's face. So much treachery had made me suspicious. I went across the room and opened the door suddenly. The nurse was there listening.

"You have traitors in the house," I said to the Squire. "I should advise you to get another nurse."

"I can act for myself now," he cried; "I feel better, I feel stronger. George alive—George coming home! And Joyce told you that Arthur had his letter?"

"Yes."

"I must see about this; I must see about it at once," he said.

"And Miss Joyce?" I queried, "what shall I do about her?"

"Bring her home—at once—no delay!" he cried; "that is," he went on, "if you will, if I may trouble you so far."

"Trouble!" I cried, the blood rushing into my face. "Trouble! why—why I'd——"

I checked myself, while the Squire looked at me keenly.

"But I must away," I continued; "the train leaves —— Station before half-past three, and I have only just time to get there."

"You've a horse?" asked the Squire

"Yes."

"Then you've twenty minutes to spare yet. Stay; I've much to say to you."

During the next quarter of an hour he plied me with questions, which I answered as well as I could. Presently he said, "Your journey here with my niece will be expensive. Are you well primed with money, young man?"

I told him the truth. I was a bit ashamed, but I thought it best. This led to other questions, and five minutes later the Squire knew something of the position in which my father stood; but I uttered no word about Kezia Tamblin, or of our connection with the Tamblin family.

He took a bunch of keys from under his pillow. "Do you mind unlocking that safe?" he said, pointing to one that stood close by his bedside. I did as he bid me.

"And will you please give me that cash-box?" he said.

I gave it to him, and he counted out twenty sovereigns and placed them in my hand. "There, we can square accounts when you bring Joyce," he said. "Now you must be off. But stay—have you had lunch?"

I had forgotten all about it, and told him so.

"And so had I," he said. "I'm sorry, but you are young. Thank you, Robert Tremain; you have given me new life. But I shall see you again to-morrow—with Joyce."

"If it is in my power, sir; but you'll be careful—you'll remember——"

"I'll remember everything," he said, grimly, and with an energy of which I should have thought him incapable an hour before. "You needn't fear, Robert Tremain; you needn't fear."

I hurried downstairs, and saw the servant who had shown me up anxiously awaiting me.

"Be careful of your master," I said; "don't trust that nurse."

She seemed to understand. Evidently the girl had her suspicions. And then I, wondering at my temerity, and wondering, too, at the way my wits seemed to be sharpened,

jumped on the horse's back, and galloped to the station.

When I arrived at Launceston that night, I had formed my plans. Clearer and clearer did everything become, until I fancied I had grasped the whole situation. But all the time my heart was sad. It seemed as though Joyce would soon slip from me, while the fact of the mortgage on Rosecarrol and my engagement to Kezia Tamblin seemed to hang like a halter around my neck. I drove all these things from my mind when I got out of the train at Launceston, however. I had my work to do, and whatever was the result I must do it.

I looked around for the porter, and soon saw him looking eagerly for me.

"That ugly fella, sur?" he began.

"Yes."

"Well, he send a telegram, he did. Then he lopped around the station."

"Yes."

"Well, then a telegram come for he 'bout haalf-past 'leven."

"Yes, go on."

"Then at haalf-past three he wur 'ere with a carriage and pair, and when the train comed in, I seed two gents git out and spaik to 'im."

"Well, you listened to what they said?"

"Iss, you tould me to, but I cudden make much ov et out. The gents axed the ugly ould chap ef he'd sarched, and he said oal night, then they axed ef anything was bein' done, and I heerd 'im zay that his hind, and his wife, and Mrs. Foxey was a scourin' the moors.

"And then the gents sweared like troopers, and they got into the carriage, and tould the coachman to drive like the wind."

I gave the man the half-a-crown I had promised him, and then I went to the stables where my horse was stabled. Three minutes later I was galloping towards my home with all the speed my Starlight was able to carry me.

Why I could not tell, but a great dread came into my heart. I was afraid of these two men. In all probability they would be Arthur Patmore and Edgar Trelaske. They would doubtless be desperate, and would move heaven and earth in order to find Joyce, and they had five hours' start of me. It was true I told myself that Sarah was faithful, and that no one could know that Joyce was at Penliggle; but all the same, it seemed easy to get her. Naturally I thought these people would go to all the houses in the neighbourhood—and they were

very few—and would inquire. A girl dressed like Joyce would be noticeable anywhere. Would not Sarah's manner render that Mrs. Foxwell suspicious? Besides, had any one seen me take Joyce to Penliggle? Or did Nick Truscott know of his wife's guest? I thought I remembered a creaking on the stairs as I came out of the little parlour the night before.

All this passed through my mind as I galloped homeward. I gave Starlight a loose rein, for I knew he would not fall, and I wanted him to know that I was in a hurry. Never did I feel so thankful for my horse as I did that night, and never did Starlight show his speed so grandly.

It was just half-past nine as I galloped through Five Lanes, a village just above Altarnun, and my heart felt like lead as I looked away towards the moors. Try as I would to drive away dark thoughts, I was sure something was wrong; everything told me that an evil thing had happened.

I had passed through Trewint, and was nearing Bolventor when I saw a woman's form in the road, while a woman's voice screamed "Stop!"

I did stop, and then I recognised the woman as Kezia Tamblin.

"Git off, Robert Tremain; I've got summin to tell 'ee," she said.

Her voice was trembling, and the light was sufficiently good for me to see how excited she was. Almost without a thought I dismounted.

"I've found 'ee out," she said; "Iss, I've found 'ee out!"

"What do you mean, Kezia?" I said, my heart becoming like lead.

"What do I mane? I knaw now why you've bin so funny thaise laast three days. I knaw oal 'bout it; you came after me for my money, you ded, and all the time you was loppin' 'bout after a mazed maid over to Dreardowns, and you knaw you was."

She seemed to be in a frenzy of passion, and was utterly incapable of reason.

"You thought yerself very clever," she went on. "You thought I should never knaw nothin' 'bout it; you done it oal on the sly, ded'n 'ee. Well, I've found 'ee out, Robert Tremain, and now you shall laive Rosecarrol, and you'll see who'll be missus there."

I did not speak; indeed, at that minute I was too much taken aback to utter a word.

"Iss, you thought Nick Truscott didn't

knaw, did'n 'ee, and ef he ded knaw you did'n think he wud tell, did 'ee?"

"Nick Truscott," I said, excitedly; "surely he didn't find out—he didn't tell you, did he?"

"You do own it, then, do'ee?" she shrieked in passion. "Iss, Nick tould me. He heerd 'ee laast night in the parlour. He heard all you said, and when Sarah went to bed she tould 'im that you was in love with thickey maazed maid, and that you ded'n want me."

"How dared Nick tell you this?" I gasped.

"Why, he'd bin to the cattle market, and I'd heerd people say that Nick ud tell everything he knawed if you gave him a drop of drink, and so I jist tried for fun. Then he tould me everything, Robert Tremain."

I had no doubt she told the truth. Wild—mad as she was, I knew that this was the truth. Sarah, never dreaming that he would utter a word, after his hearing our conversation in the parlour, had doubtless told him my story, and he, true to his reputation, had, after taking some drink, blurted everything out.

"You knaw what I tould 'ee the other night, Robert Tremain. I zed that ef

another maid ded come between you and me, I'd kill her. Well——"

"You have not dared to go near her?" I shouted; "if you have——"

"Kip quiet," she said. "No, I ain't a bin nist her, but I wud, iss, and I was jist agoin' to 'er, when Peter Sleeman and two gents come up in a carriage and pair."

"You didn't tell them?" I gasped.

"Yes, I did," she cried, triumphantly, "and by this time your mazed maid es in the hands of her keepers again."

I lifted my hand to strike her—at that moment I should have felt a joy in doing so; but I remembered that she was a woman, and my hand dropped powerless.

Without waiting a second or listening to the torrent of abuse that she poured on me, I sprang on Starlight's back and rode madly towards Penliggle.

CHAPTER XI.

The Strange Meeting on the Moors.

During my ride I had time to think again. I wondered whether Sleeman had been to Dreardowns before calling at "The Queen's Head," and I wished I had asked Kezia how long since they had left her. However, no time was to be lost, and it was for me to act, and act quickly. If they had been to Penliggle, and had taken Joyce, then I must ride after them. They had not started for Launceston or I should have met them. But would they go there? Did they know what steps I was taking in the matter?

Hark! what was that?

It sounded like a woman's cry; it echoed across the moor and died in the moaning of the wind. I dug my heels into Starlight's sides—I clenched my fists nervously. And yet the cry gave me hope. Evidently, they were at their work. Not knowing that his father knew his secret, and was acquainted with his treachery, Arthur Patmore would

devise some other means to save himself from being practically disinherited, while Trelaske, having compromised himself in the matter, would fight like grim death.

Unmindful of every obstacle, I dashed right across the country. The hedges were not high, and Starlight cleared them easily. When I arrived at Penliggle, all was dark, all was quiet. My heart sunk like lead. I burst open the door and lit a match, and then I saw that Nick Truscott and Sarah lay on the ground bound. In a minute I had unbound them and enabled them to speak.

Sarah was the first to recover herself.

"Towards Bolventor by the lower cart track, Robert, my deear," she gasped; "quick, and you'll catch 'em!"

I did not wait a second, for I was afraid for Joyce's safety. What they might do I did not know, I dared not think. I had not ridden far when I heard the rumble of wheels. I knew they must go slowly, for the road was bad, and, while the night was not very dark, I was sure they must be careful if they did not overturn the carriage.

Grasping my heavy riding whip, I rode up to the carriage. At that moment I felt strong and determined. Never did I

feel so thankful for my strength as I did then; never did I rejoice in the saying of the farm-labourers, that "Maaster Robert was a match for two men," more than at that moment. Unmindful of results I lifted my riding whip. It had a heavy bone handle, and, wielded by a strong man, it was a formidable weapon. I brought the handle heavily on the rider's head, and without a sound he fell heavily on the ground. Then I jumped from Starlight, and held the horses' heads. They were evidently tired out, and seemed in no hurry to move on.

"What's the matter?" shouted a voice from the carriage.

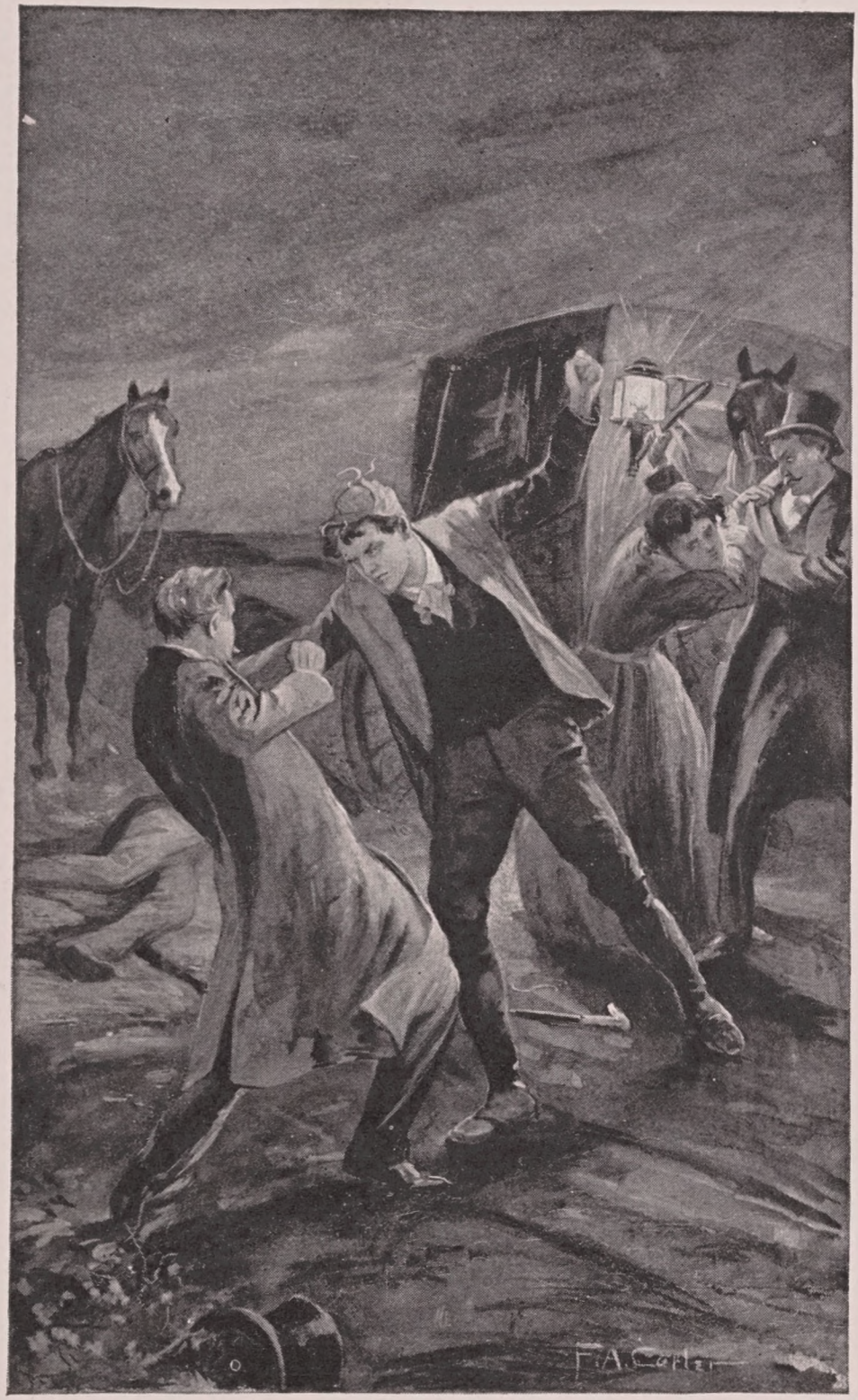
"The matter has come to an end," was my reply.

Instantly the carriage door opened. "What do you say?" shouted a voice.

"You must give Miss Joyce Patmore her liberty," I answered.

"Mind her, Edgar!" I heard a voice say, and then another voice came from the carriage. It was Joyce's voice saying, "Robert."

I should have gone to her, if I had been able, because the sound of her voice calling me by my name seemed to take away my reason. But a man met me, a man nearly as tall as I.



"A minute later and I was fighting him."—Page 153.

A minute later and I was fighting him, hand to hand, for I had dropped my whip. It was a stiff tussle, for he was a strong man, but I mastered him, and was about to throw him heavily on the ground, when I saw that the other had come from the carriage. He held something in his hand, and I saw that he had lifted it to strike me. He hesitated a second, doubtless for fear of striking the man with whom I was fighting, instead of me. Had he struck me I should no doubt have been disabled; perhaps he might have killed me. That second's hesitation, however, saved me, for before he could strike the blow I heard another woman's scream, and I saw his arm gripped. Struggling as I was with the man I had practically conquered, I could see that the woman held him fast, in spite of his endeavours to free himself. She had assured my victory. I threw my opponent from me as only a wrestler could, and then rushed to the carriage. In a minute more Joyce Patmore was in my arms.

I had scarcely freed her from the bonds which bound her, when I heard Nick Truscott's voice shouting: "Maaster Robert!"

"All right, Nick; come quickly," I answered back.

By this time the man had thrown the woman who had saved me, from him, and was coming towards me.

"It is no use, Mr. Edgar Trelaske," I said; "I have been to Grassdale to-day and have told Mr. Patmore everything. He knows that George Patmore will soon be home, he knows what you have done with his niece. I tell you it is no use."

He stopped as though he had been shot. "Did you hear that, Arthur?" he cried.

"Yes, I heard," was the reply, and I saw the man he called Arthur rise to his feet. That moment Nick Truscott and Sarah came up.

"What a fool I've been," I heard Edgar Trelaske say. "There! let us get away from here. Where's the driver? Get up, you fellow!"

The driver got up and rubbed his head. I had only stunned him; the hard hat which he wore had broken the blow.

I still held Joyce in my arms. She seemed to feel safe there, and again my heart beat joyfully. "Where's the woman who helped me?" I asked, looking around.

There was no answer to my question, but I saw a woman slowly retreating from us.

"Who can it be?" I thought, and Nick

Truscott, as if anxious to atone for the trouble he had caused, ran and caught her by the arm.

"Why, 'tes Kezia Tamblin!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," she said, coming back, and standing before me, "'tis Kezia Tamblin." Then she burst out sobbing. "I cudden help tellin' these men what Nick Truscott told me," she continued, "and I cudden help stoppin' that man from hurtin' 'ee, Robert. I said in my heart that I wished he would kill 'ee; but when I saw him goin' to hit 'ee, I cudden help——" and then she burst out sobbing again.

Edgar Trelaske and Arthur Patmore took no notice of us—they realised that they had been defeated and prepared to go back to Launceston.

"Good-night, Kezia," I said, feeling ashamed of myself for having made her think I had cared for her. "I hope the man did not hurt you?"

By this time her mood had changed, perhaps she realised that the bond between us had been broken.

"What do you care?" she cried. "You care 'bout nothin' but the mazed maid. I'm nothin' to 'ee. Oh, I wish I had'n' come here; then perhaps—perhaps—oa, I wish I

cud hate you, Robert Tremain, I do! I do!" Then she walked away without another word.

"Come, Miss Joyce," I said, "you shall sleep to-night at Rosecarrol. Starlight, my horse, shall carry us both. Come here, Starlight," and the faithful creature came up to me.

"Stop a minute, Robert Tremain," said Arthur Patmore. "You say you have seen my father at Grassdale to-day, you say he knows all about the letter from my brother, and the meaning of my cousin's disappearance?"

"Yes," I replied; "and he understands the whole business. I told him what your cousin has told me, and you know what that means."

He stood looking at me as though he would like to have killed me, then he turned away and went towards the carriage.

"Curse you!" he said, bitterly, as he slammed the carriage-door.

I did not answer, but prepared to mount Starlight, when both of them came back again.

"Look you, Robert Tremain: is there any reason why the people around Grassdale should be told of this? You are not a fellow that wants to blab, and surely Joyce does not

wish to have her affairs to be the talk of the countryside."

"Arthur," said Joyce, "I shall say nothing unless there is a necessity for it, you know I will not. But if ever the time should come that either of you make it necessary for the truth to be told, I shall tell it."*

"And I repeat what your cousin says," I answered him as quietly as I could, "though God knows you don't deserve it."

The two went away together then, without speaking further to us, but I heard them uttering bitter words together, as they got into the carriage; even then I believe they would have attacked me again had they dared, if only out of pure revenge.

I heard afterwards that they had a desperate struggle to get Joyce away from Sarah, for Peter Sleeman had left them at the cottage door, refusing to take any further part in the business.

I need not try and describe my feelings as I rode with Joyce to Rosecarrol, neither will I tell of the way that my mother received Joyce, when I took her to her room and told

* The time has come. I need not tell why here, save to say that Edgar Trelaske caused lying tales to be afloat, and that is partly why I have written this story.—R. T.

her my story. And yet, in spite of my joy, my heart was sad, for as I looked at her I dared not think that she could ever care anything for me. Besides, my father's anger was great towards me. I had driven him from his home, he said; I had by my madness lost the land which had been in the family for generations, and added the family of Tremains to the list of paupers.

I made him no answer, save to ask him what he would have done in my place. At that he looked at me strangely, and then went away without speaking a word.

The next day I took Joyce to Grassdale, but I will not tell of the journey or of her meeting with her uncle. In spite of Mr. Patmore's joy because of the safe return of his niece, he was very weak and despondent. He had passed through a painful interview with his son Arthur a few hours before—an interview which had ended in the young man leaving his home, not to return until he had won his father's respect by an altered life.

Of the confessions which Arthur had been obliged to make I know little. I was led to understand that his career was anything but praiseworthy, and that his relations to Edgar Trelaske were of such a nature as to necessitate his departure from the country. I may

also state here that a few weeks later Bodinnick House and lands were advertised for sale.

I stayed at Grassdale one night, there being no means whereby I could return the same day. Somehow, in spite of my success in bringing Joyce back to her home, I was gloomy and sad. Everything seemed so different from what I had hoped. Besides, I was suffering for all the excitement through which I had gone. Those three eventful days seemed like years, so much thought and action and anxiety had been crowded into them. Joyce, too, looked pale and ill; doubtless she was suffering from the effects of her strange experiences.

"I am sorry I have not been able to make things more pleasant for you, Robert Tremain," said Mr. Patmore, just before I left; "but, as you know, I have been greatly troubled—greatly troubled. I have been ill for a good while, and events have been a little too much for me. But I shall soon be better; yes, I shall soon be better. You know how I thank you, my lad; I cannot express it in words, but—but——" He hesitated a second, then he said, "You'll come and see us again soon, won't you? Say at Christmas."

"Thank you, I shall be very glad," I replied.

"That's right. Things, I hope, will be different then—perhaps; but there, good-bye, thank you, and God bless you!"

Joyce met me in the library; she looked very pale and ill, while her lips trembled and her eyes were filled with tears. I longed to take her in my arms, and tell her that I loved her—longed to tell her that my life would be a blank until I saw her again; but I dared not. It would have been unmanly to say this after I had rendered her a service; besides, I felt that she could only think of me as a friend.

When she began to tell of her thanks I stopped her: how could I let her continue, when it had been the joy of my life to serve her, when I could no more have helped trying to rescue her than a bird can help flying?

"I shall see you again, I hope, Mr. Tremain," she said, as she held out her hand. She seemed to have forgotten that my name was Robert.

"Yes, I'm coming at Christmas," I replied. "I have promised your uncle."

Then my heart was gladdened again, for I saw the light of joy flash into her eyes.

I arrived at Rosecarrol just before midnight; my heart heavy at the thought of the dark days that must come when we had to leave the old homestead; and yet I was happy as I thought of the coming Christmas.

CHAPTER XII.

How the Mists were Cleared Away.

For the next three days I roamed the moors like one demented. I felt incapable of work; I had no interest in life. It seemed as though a blight had fallen upon me, and that all joy had gone for ever. I hated those brown lonely wastes, and yet I was attracted by them. Rosecarrol was hateful to me, and all the while I dreaded the action I was sure Tamblin would take.

The day after I returned I received a package from Kezia Tamblin; it contained the little articles I had given her, but not a line was sent with it. Evidently she was trying to wipe me out of the pages of her life. No message came from Hezekiah, however; perhaps he was planning a bitter revenge. The second day after I had bidden good-bye to Joyce, I met Peter Sleeman. I had been near his house, and was trying to live over again the experiences through which I had passed there. He came up to

me like an angry man, and I thought he was going to pour forth a torrent of abuse. When we stood face to face, however, he altered his mind, and, after looking at me for a few seconds, he walked away without speaking a word.

On the third day a strange man came to Rosecarrol, and had a long interview with my father.

"I expect it is Tamblin's lawyer," was my thought, and throughout the rest of the day my heart was, if possible, sadder than before. I felt that I could not meet my father, for somehow it seemed to me that I had been guilty of causing him to lose the home he loved. When I returned to the house, however, he was quite cheerful; he laughed as he had laughed years before, in the days when money difficulties did not press upon him.

"Was that Tamblin's lawyer?" I asked him.

"No, Robert lad."

"Who then?"

He looked at me steadily for a few seconds, then he said, "My luck has turned, Bob."

"How?"

"Mining is looking up, so are the clay-works,"

"I shall be able to sell my shares in Polgooth; ay, and sell them well. A new clay bed is opened up, too, of splendid quality."

"You don't mean it?"

"I do."

"But you can't realise at once, can you?"

"Well," he said, after hesitating a few seconds, "not exactly, but I've been able to transfer the mortgage on Rosecarrol, and, thank God, Bob, the old home is saved!"

"What, are you out of Tamblin's power?"

"Yes, my lad."

"But how?"

"He's got all the money he advanced, Bob, and the deeds are safe!"

"But how did you manage if you are not able to realise on the mines and clayworks?"

"Never you mind, my boy. You'll know all in good time."

I ought to have rejoiced beyond measure at this, but I did not. My heart was sad in spite of everything.

A week later another piece of news astonished me. I heard that Kezia Tamblin was walking out with Tom Nicolls, of Trewint. Some of the gossips said that she had taken up with him just to spite me; and others, that she had loved him all the

time, and only went with me to please her father. I could not help wondering at this, but I comforted myself that her love for me could not have been very deep, that it had only been a fancy which passed away easily. Moreover, I rejoiced with a great joy that I had not married her, even although Joyce could never be anything to me. I remembered her mad jealousy; I remembered, too, the awful abuse she had poured upon me that night when she learnt I did not love her. And yet it was scarcely a wonder that she should be angry; besides, but for her I might have been killed.

Truly, a woman's heart is past finding out! But I feel I can say but little about this. Men's hearts are mean enough, God knows, and as I thought of how I was willing to take the marriage vow to save Rosecarrol for the Tremain family, I blushed with shame. Still I thought more of mother than of Rosecarrol.

During the weeks which intervened between the day of Joyce's return to Grassdale and Christmas Eve, I never heard from her. Not a line passed between us. For my own part, I was afraid to write, and I had great fears that she had forgotten me.

On the morning of the day before

Christmas Eve, however, I received a note from Mr. Patmore. It was dated on the morning of the 22nd of December, and contained three lines:—

"We are expecting you on Wednesday. Don't fail on any account; we shall all be greatly disappointed if you do. The carriage shall meet the five o'clock train."

I need not say that I was early for the train at Launceston. Father drove me to the station, and although Starlight trotted splendidly, he went all too slow for me. When I got into the carriage, my father said to me, "Bob, I may as well tell you that Mr. Patmore has got the deeds of Rosecarrol."

"What?"

"Yes, it was his lawyer you saw that day. He advanced the necessary money: but Mr. Patmore has got a letter from me this morning to say that I shall be prepared to pay him back in a fortnight. There's a fortune in Polgooth after all, and the thousand pounds which I thought were lying dead are worth six thousand now, Bob. I thought I would tell you this. You will feel more comfortable."

It was six o'clock when I arrived at Grassdale. I had fondly hoped that Joyce would meet me at the station, but the carriage was

quite empty as I entered it, and it was with many forebodings and fears that I went into the house half-an-hour later.

The welcome to me was a right royal one. Mr. Patmore, who seemed quite recovered, shook my hand with great heartiness, and seemed to have a difficulty to express his feelings of kindness; and then a surprise awaited me. Two men entered the room: the one a brown-bearded man of about fifty, the other a young fellow of twenty-eight or thirty.

"This," said Mr. Patmore, placing his hand on the shoulder of the latter, "is my eldest son George, and this is my brother Robert—he bears your name, you see."

"Your brother?" I stammered.

"Yes, my brother, and Joyce's father. Where is Joyce, by the way? She was here a minute ago."

Joyce came in just then, and my heart was all of a flutter. I can't explain my feelings. Young fellows of twenty-one who have been in love will know all about it.

I don't know what I said, I don't remember a single word that was spoken to me. I just feasted my eyes on Joyce. If I had thought her beautiful, when, pale and fearful, she stood by the window at Dreardowns, what

must I think of her as she stood in the bright light of the room amongst her dear ones, her eyes shining with a new light, and her cheeks flushed with health and joy?

The evening passed swiftly away. No one was there but Joyce—at least, I thought not. It is true old Mr. Patmore laughed with great heartiness, and Joyce's father told how he had bargained for and bought Bodinnick house and lands for himself and his daughter, and George told stories of Australia, while I pretended to listen to everything they said; but all the time I saw no one but Joyce.

I was wonderfully happy, and terribly sad.

At one time I loved George Patmore as a brother, and at another I hated him because I thought he seemed in love with Joyce.

By-and-by—it was close upon midnight, and the carol singers had gone—Joyce and I were together in the hall. I don't know how it came about, I am sure; I fancy I had gone out to see how beautiful the snow looked beneath the light of the moon, but it doesn't matter. Joyce and I were together.

A few minutes before I had despaired of ever plucking up courage to tell her what I wanted to tell, but now I felt I must speak.

I determined to be honest; I would hide nothing from her. So I began to describe my father's money difficulties.

"I think I know all about it," she said; "Sarah Truscott, your old servant, told me."

"Did she?" I gasped; "and did she tell you all the rest?"

"I think she did," she answered with a laugh.

"I—I was mad," I cried; "I did not know what I was doing. I loved Rosecarrol, and I loved my mother a thousand times more, so I—oh, I'm ashamed of myself; but when I saw you, I thought of you, lived only for you! You hear, don't you?" and I caught her arm.

She did not speak, but I felt her trembling.

"Well, I needn't tell you anything else, Joyce. I—I—oh, tell me something, give me a little hope—say, oh Joyce—tell me! I love you with all my life!"

Then she gave a little laugh that had a sob in it.

"Won't you answer me, Joyce? Oh, if you don't love me I must leave to-night—I couldn't stay if—won't you speak?"

We were, as I said, standing in the hall, and it was decorated for Christmas.

"Must I go then?" I asked; "is there no hope for me?"

"Robert," she said, laughing and crying at the same time, "don't you see that we are under the mistletoe?"

That is all I am going to say about the joy that came to me that Christmas Eve, while words are too poor to tell of the happiness that has come to me since then. May God make me worthy of my Joyce—she whom I won in dark despairing days; she for whom I found it a joy to suffer and to fight; she who is now my wife and the mother of my children.

THE END.

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